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**Integration/exclusion? : young British Asians and the politics of ethnicity.**

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# **Integration/Exclusion?: Young British Asians and the Politics of Ethnicity**

By  
Sadaf S. Lakhani

A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy at  
King's College, London, University of London, September 2000



## **Abstract**

The aim of this thesis is to question the dichotomy and legitimacy of the use of the term 'social exclusion' or 'integration' in relation to minority groups. Examining the politics of exclusion at the level of every-day life, the thesis presents an analysis of the process of identification and ethnicity negotiation of young British Asians. As such the thesis will contribute to the linking of theories of 'new ethnicities' to social realities through the employment of an ethnographic method and contextual analysis. In addition, the thesis aims to add to the literature on the creation of new cultural forms by young British Asians.

The thesis argues for a more contextual conceptualisation of identity and ethnicity based on a politics of interaction.

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# Chapter One

## Introduction

### Overview

Questions of identity have increasingly captured geographers' attention (Keith and Pile 1993a, Badcock 1996). Set within the twin frameworks of globalisation and postmodernism, new, pertinent questions have been raised about identity. The initial questions that surfaced with the growing popularity of the 'cultural turn', such as inquiries into 'what it means to be British' and attempted definitions of notoriously elusive terms like 'culture', have since been elaborated on. This had been seen in a spatial reinterpretation of identities (e.g. Massey 1993, 1995, Rose 1996, Thrift and Pile 1995, Thrift 1996), in the consideration of how identity may be affected by globalisation (e.g. King 1991, Hall 1991) and, specifically within postmodern politics, an exploration and questioning of the importance of a politics based on *subjective* rather than *racial* identity positions of traditionally marginal groups (Marable 1993).

One purportedly marginal group that has claimed much recent media attention, but as yet little academic interest, is British Asian<sup>1</sup> youth (Rattansi 1994). South-Asians constitute Britain's largest ethnic minority group, with 2.7 % of the total population, compared with the next largest, that of 'black' ethnic groups, who make up 1.6%. South-Asians also have the youngest age structure of all ethnic groups, with over 44% of Asians in Britain under 24

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<sup>1</sup> The term 'Asian' or 'South-Asian' and even British 'Asian' is problematic in describing Britons of South-Asian origin, and is vulnerable to the same criticisms directed at other imposed terms or forms of categorisation. However it remains in use in this study, as both a delineator of a constructed category and as the subject of deconstruction. As such, I am not ascribing an essentialised ethnicity. The use of 'Bangali', or 'Indian' or 'Pakistani' in this thesis refers to young people's/parents' country of origin.

years old (UK Census 1991). According to the 1991 Census, 50% of the British Asian population are British-born, and not 'immigrants' as some of the literature persists in labelling them, but the children, grandchildren and even great grandchildren of immigrants. Furthermore, most of the population of South-Asian origin have UK citizenship rights (Anwar 1995), but as I will suggest later, this itself does not imply inclusion in British society.

Media representations of British Asian youth, although limited in number and superficial in content, report on almost every aspect of their lives, from the music cultures of Bhangra and Drum'n' Bass, to the food culture of 'Balti and Chip Butties'. Much of the coverage this young population has received has been treated with an air of awe and rebellion (Sanghera 1994). A message that is commonly presented is that British Asians are turning their backs on their parents' patriarchal culture and are seeking westernised lifestyles (e.g. Valley and Brown 1995b). These articles tend to document young British Asians in what are portrayed as distinctly 'un-Asian' activities, such as in the popular music industry (see Simpson 1993, Eshun 1994, Raphael 1994, JT 1996). Many, it is reported, are 'Caught in the Culture Trap'<sup>2</sup> (Ahuja 1997, see also Wade and Souter 1992, Jones 1993, Modood et al 1997), whereas young people from other minority groups, such as Afro-Caribbeans, are reported to have succeeded in maintaining their cultural traditions, while assimilating and integrating into wider society (Hall 1995).

Contrasting with this view, British Asians have been depicted as the most racist and most self-inclusive of ethnic groups in Britain (Shaw 1994); a group that is often presented

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<sup>2</sup> The idea of a 'culture clash' or being 'trapped between two cultures' is also often referred to unproblematically within the academic literature. It seems to be based on an assumption that: a) the cultures are radically different from each other and b) that this is problematic (e.g. Ghuman 1999, Taylor and Hergarty 1985, Taylor 1976). Comparisons have not been made with other situations of possible cultural conflict, for example, that of intergenerational conflict in 'ethnic' majority groups.

as unwilling to compromise with their 'host' society (Stonehouse 2000, see also Sagar 1999). An example that is commonly referred to as illustrating this is the 'Rushdie Affair', where young as well as old Muslims in Britain spoke out against what many of them viewed as an attack on their religion ('going wild' claimed *The Guardian* Nov 13 1996) (Akhtar 1989, Parekh 1990). The formation of isolationist identities, such as the increase in forms of militant Islam on college campuses and the existence of ethnic street gangs, have been pointed to as evidence of a 'them and us' attitude amongst British Asians (e.g. Smythe 1996). Recent TV documentaries depict British-born Asian youngsters as a group that is increasingly turning back to their religions and traditions, for example in voluntarily rejecting the 'western' idea of love and opting for arranged marriages (e.g. 'Arranged Marriage' Channel 4, 26 November, 1995). Certain groups within this category have been in the firing line more than others. This applies particularly to Bangalis. They have been focused on as an ethnic group that is becoming increasingly marginalised. This is claimed to be linked to lack of effort in learning English and unmotivated, poor performances at school (see Gordon 1997), as well as the adoption of a 'ghetto attitude' by many youngsters (Jackson and Taylor 1996).

With a range of sometimes conflicting media and academic commentaries, it is difficult to get an idea of the realities of British Asian identities. A recent publication entitled *Telling it how it is* (Kassam 1997), which offers a compilation of accounts from over 20 young Asian females, seeks to set the record straight about the most maligned stereotype of all: that of the oppressed and down trodden young Asian female (see also Brah and Minhas 1985, Bachu 1993, 1996). These differing accounts, ranging from "... rebelling against tradition to fit in with their peers, to passionately defending their culture and religion" (Kassam 1997:2), illustrate that the experiences and identities of British Asian females are diverse. However, in popular culture representations of British Asians tend to be reduced to easily accessible caricatures, such as bus conductors, corner shop keepers, accountants and so on (Srinivasan 1995, see also Bald 1991). Although there have been a

few attempts to show that 'British Asian' means a lot more than this, lifestyle and culture, let alone subjectivity, have been taking second place to 'race' (Marable 1993).

## **Social Exclusion**

With the recent set-up of The Social Exclusion Unit at Whitehall, minority groups will be focused on increasingly in "... bringing Britain back together ... in the attack on exclusions" (Prime Minister's speech, Stockwell Park School 1997). A similar interest is seen amongst independent research organisations where special exclusion strands have been established, and questions of integration and citizenship are being raised in relation to ethnic minorities (e.g. University of East London). 'Youth', 'citizenship' and 'social change' have also featured as key themes in recent ESRC research programmes, stating a need to identify 'origins, forms and outcomes' of young people's marginalisation and exclusion (ESRC 1998:1). Within a wider, European context, there has been an increasing focus on the inclusion of immigrant and refugee groups, as well as more established 'immigrant' groups, into the 'new Europe' (Alund 1997, see also European Commission DG Social Affairs and Employment 2000). In the context of this burgeoning interest in issues of social exclusion, this study will examine the contention that young British Asians are socially excluded through an analysis of their interactions in everyday life. I will argue, through an examination of how young people construct their identities, for the employment of a more 'relational', processual concept of exclusion than that which is presently in common usage.

But before we ask questions about whether (and why) young British Asians (or any other social group) are 'integrated' or 'excluded', a definition of the terms 'integration' and 'exclusion' should be sought. These terms are often used together, as if to signify binary oppositions. The normalised use of this binary implies that there are no in-between states of



being – only integration, or only exclusion. Another problem with using these terms is that they have a referential meaning. Their meaning according to the Chambers Concise Dictionary (1991:539:359) is as follows:

**integrate** *in'ti-grat*, *vt* to make up as a whole; to entire; to combine, amalgamate; to incorporate (one person or thing) into another. To desegregate.

**exclude** *iks-klood'*, *vt* to shut out; to throw out; to prevent from entering; to omit; to prevent from taking part; to except, leave out. *-n exclusion* (-zhen) a shutting out or putting out; ejection; prevention from inclusion or entry.

The words 'integrate' and 'exclude', as defined above, are verbs. They must involve two bodies, one or more *doing* the excluding and one or more *being* excluded, or even a body doing the excluding and *thereby* being excluded. However, there must be *something* to exclude *from*. It is here that the literature gets fuzzy. For one, what constitutes integration, and exactly what should the 'other' group be integrated into. Further, as we can see from the definitions given above, integration and exclusion are not antonyms, as the opposite of exclusion is actually inclusion. I will argue that, in the context of ethnic minorities, the use of 'integration' rather than 'inclusion' as the antonym of exclusion hides an implicit political agenda.

But how have these concepts been approached in the academic literature? In broad terms, there has been a tendency to investigate 'social exclusion' in an empiricist manner, using mainly ethnocentric statistical analysis and “descriptive monographs” (Samers 1998: 126). A common way in which the integration of social groups at a national and regional level has been defined and assessed by geographers is through examining residential segregation or the spatial distribution of the groups (e.g. Dahya 1974, Massey and Denton 1987, Eyles 1990, Smith 1990, Owen 1992, Peach 1997, but see also Young 1999, 2000 for a fresh perspective on residential segregation and 'integration'). Highly segregated clusters of social groups are thought to be the result of either preference or discriminatory practices.

In education, school achievement, including examination grades and attendance at higher education, have been regarded as important indicators for assessing ethnic minority integration (e.g. Brown 1984, Department of Education and Science 1985, Drew et al 1992, Jones 1993). The same is true of economic indicators, such as unemployment rates, labour force participation and occupational structures.

However, when used to measure 'integration', indicators such as these are fraught with problems. One of the main problems goes back to ambiguity over the concept 'integration', since many of these indicators are inherently ethnocentric. For example, low rates of labour force participation, arguably an indicator of 'exclusion', have been attributed to Pakistani women in Britain, without taking into account the cultural reasons behind the seeming lack of economic activity (Ballard 1997). Furthermore, on their own, these indicators cannot give an adequate picture. All too frequently an 'ethnic' minority group is referred to as if it were a undifferentiated body (see Drew et al 1991, with regard to 'South-Asians'), whereas there may be several factors, such as class, gender, or other social structures, that cut across 'ethnicity'. Moreover, since 'integration' may take many social forms, and operate at different spatial scales (Sibley 1995), we must ask whether integration at one level necessarily implies integration at another. Furthermore, does one form of integration necessarily imply integration in other forms (Martinello 1997)?

For Sibley (1995) and Samers (1998) social exclusion should be conceived as a process with two subsets. On the one hand, there are processes of 'material' exclusion, such as housing, recreation facilities, schools, jobs. On the other hand, there are processes of discursive exclusion, which contribute to material exclusion, such as invisibility in reports, representation and exclusion by the media, and racism (of individuals and official institutions, like housing authorities and immigration services). Yet if social exclusion is a multidimensional process, it has been analysed all too often in a one-dimensional manner (Samers 1998). As Sibley (1995:xv) asserts, any study of exclusion should necessarily

concern itself with an investigation of 'inclusion': "... with the normal as well as the deviant, the same as well as the other, and with the credentials required to gain entry to the dominant groups in society". Geddes and Favell (1999) also propose that any examination of social exclusion or citizenship issues should explore the politics of belonging to a society or nation, as well as informal and symbolic barriers to inclusion. As such, analyses of the 'integration' of British Asian youth into British society must examine not only their socio-economic circumstances, but also the politics of belonging to British society.

In the many uses of the term exclusion/integration by policy making and research bodies there exists an apparent dichotomy that implicitly suggests a "... seeming opposition between minority identities and majority identity" (Ryang 1997:245). For Anderson (1991), the concept of the nation-state is a major reason for the belief in a universal majority identity. The nation-state model assumes an affinity between the 'state' (an artificially bounded territory) and the 'nation' (a bounded culture believed to be homogenous). Different identities and cultures in the nation-state are forgotten or invisible in populist discourse and even official statements, thus France becomes the land of the French and 'French culture', Britain the land of the British and 'British culture' (Martinello 1995). Immigrants (even second or third generation 'immigrants' by way of physical markers) are seen to be natural carriers of their 'own culture', as if this is unproblematically linked to their 'race' or territory of origin (see Soysal 1996). Of course, citizenship has long been associated with the issue of nationality and with forms of exclusion through immigration control. As well as strict immigration controls in most European countries, the granting of citizenship involves inclusive and exclusive policies and procedures that ultimately distinguish 'who may participate', 'who is a citizen', and 'who (fully) belongs' (Layton Henry 1990, Smith 1993). Thus, some EU countries still deny political citizenship to immigrants and their descendants, while others restrict access to welfare benefits, or civil and social rights (Mitchell and Russell 1994, Janoski and Glennie 1995). In the UK the notion of citizenship is so vague that no less than six different types of British nationality officially exist, ranging

from British citizenship to British Protected Persons status (Cohen 1995, Smith and Blanc 1995). The fuzzy boundaries of 'Britishness', Cohen (1995) believes, are ramified in legal definitions, as well as elite and popular understandings, and constitute a virtually impenetrable barrier that is constructed to exclude (see also Soysal 1996).

The race and citizenship debate in the UK is riddled with tension over two opposing views regarding what integration entails. A similar debate has taken place in the race relations literature (Solomos 1993). On the one hand, assimilationists, fuelled by events such as the Notting Hill and Brixton 'race' riots of the 1950s and 1980s, as well as by more recent racial tensions in Tower Hamlets, and of course the Rushdie Affair, argue that the prerequisite to citizenship is cultural conformity (see Young 1990a). The second view, that of the multiculturalist, is often thought to be more 'liberal', through its advocacy of the right of ethnic minorities to be culturally distinct and respected. However, as Schmitter-Heisler (1992) points out, this 'liberal' view is as muddled as the assimilationist view. Much multiculturalist policy has revolved around official recognition, and the elaborate classification, of minority groups. As Soysal (1996:5) points out, this reifies old notions of race and ethnicity:

These classifications are primarily aimed at recognising differences and generating policies and institutions geared towards the 'special needs' of immigrant groups, needs which are assumed to rise from their prescribed cultural traditions, and which are defined as necessarily incompatible with host-society cultural frameworks.

The multiculturalist approach has also been criticised as superficial in its understanding of culture. For example, Donald and Rattansi (1992) see it as reproducing the 'saris, samosas and steel bands syndrome', without actually questioning hierarchies of power regulated by 'cultural authority'. Despite multiculturalism's celebration of the diversity of cultures it does not accord these cultures an alternative centre of cultural authority, but portrays them as 'different' from a central and centrally accepted English culture (Donald and Rattansi 1992).

With such ambiguities over integration in the 'host society', it is not difficult to understand why immigrants and their descendants may be confused about the desirability and 'mechanisms' of how to 'integrate' (see also Bald 1991). Yet one consequence of unresolved demands over the integration on ethnic minority groups has been reported to include the consolidation of ethnic alliances and the preservation of traditions as a response to perceived inferiority within the 'host' society (Verkuyten 1997, also Wallman 1979, Soysal 1996). Even those who would like to view themselves as British may be met by adverse attitudes, such as those expressed by the comedian Bernard Manning. When asked about the identity of British-born children of immigrants his reply was: "Just because a dog is born in a stable, that doesn't make it a horse" (The Mrs Merton Show, ITV, 18 April 1998).<sup>3</sup> This attitude has been echoed in much post-war legislation concerning immigration (see Saggar 1999). Racist and inciting viewpoints, some calling for repatriation, have also been expressed by key politicians concerning the contribution of immigrant populations to the British economy (see Miles and Phizlakea 1984). The most memorable of these proclamations was the infamous 'Rivers of Blood' speech made by Enoch Powell in 1968, but little had changed even 10 years later, when Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher (25 Feb 1979) expressed a sense of Britain being 'swamped' by immigrants (see Alexander 1996:2). Restrictive immigration policies of the 1970s culminated in the British Nationality Act of 1981. By decreeing that those born in the UK by non-British parents will not automatically receive nationality and citizenship, this Act denied that birthplace confers citizenship (Cohen 1995). Lord Tebbit later backed this argument, both in 1990 and again in 1998, by stating that even those who had been born and lived in the UK for a long time do not see themselves, and therefore cannot be seen, as British. The incompatibility and threat of 'black' cultures to the 'British character' was here reasserted, alongside a demand that these communities assimilate to the 'British way of life' (BBC Radio 4 Today Programme, 21

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<sup>3</sup> This comment was very similar to that made by Enoch Powell in 1968: "The West Indian or Asian does not, by being born in Britain, become an Englishman. In law he becomes a United Kingdom citizen by birth, in fact he is a West Indian or Asian still." (quoted in Crowley 1999:36)

April 1990, in Alexander 1996:3). The explicit conflation of race and culture in the statements of Tebbitt, Thatcher and Powell helps fuel sentiments that immigrants can never be seen as 'British' (see also Sarup 1994). In the light of this we may ask what possibly can integration mean for young, often British-born, British Asians? In this thesis 'exclusion' is examined through an exploration of the ways in which the social dynamics of integration are negotiated and expressed in the identifications of young British Asians. The thesis argues that it is possible to address questions of social exclusion and integration through examination of 'the politics of belonging' to British society.

## **Structure of Thesis**

Before returning to address the question of the integration/exclusion of young British Asians through an analysis of interaction and identification, it is first necessary to examine the way in which 'ethnic' groups and 'ethnicity' are conceptualised. As such, I will also explore contemporary conceptualisations of 'difference'. Chapter Two explores this by drawing on recent academic work regarding culture, ethnicity, and identity. These concepts have been set within a few, at times almost competing, frameworks of thought. The first, that of postmodernism, concerns the politics of the exploration of notions of difference and questions the acceptability of previous political projects associated with race and representation. The second is that of a re-conceptualised notion of space and an increasingly globalised world, where the boundaries of place, nation and community are dissolving into placelessness, mobility and 'virtual' space (Robbins 1991). Senses of belonging and identity have been problematised within this hypothesised 'disorientated' world, where cultural mixing and intense webs of information leave all they touch hybridised. Related to these issues, there has been a concern over the ways space and place are unique in fashioning identities. I will argue that there is a need for the reinterpretation of the concept of identity and ethnicity using a particular conceptualisation of space.

In Chapter Three the manner in which these ideas have been implemented through empirical analysis will be outlined. Here methodological issues relevant to research on issues of identity and ethnicity are explored, alongside consideration of the issues of representation and positionality. Chapter Four then focuses on central axes of difference which may have salience in the formation of 'ethnic' identities. Here it is argued that the axes of gender, religion, physical appearance and 'class' are important in the construction of difference and ethnic identities because of the way they are constructed within British Asian and dominant British cultures. As such, these can be important ethnic resources, not through an abstract primordial loyalty, but through the ways they are constructed as representing the key differences between the British Asian cultures and those of wider British society.

These ideas are carried into Chapter Five, which examines the way the identities of the British Asian youths involved in this study are contextual and relational. This is achieved by presenting an account of their identity formations in different spaces of social interaction. Drawing on the way young British Asian identities are formulated, Chapter Six then argues that social exclusion must be seen as a dynamic process involving multi-party action. Overall, the thesis suggests that re-conceptualisations of ethnicity and exclusion, alongside analysis of the politics of belonging, are needed to examine the position of young British Asians within wider British society.

## Chapter Two

### Academic Interpretations

#### Overview

The shift from modernism to postmodernism, which has been referred to as the 'philosophical condition of late capitalism' (Jameson 1984), has been instrumental in the contemporary conceptualisation of culture and identity. Whilst initially playing only a cameo role in disciplines outside art, architecture and literature, debates on postmodernism have now shot to superstar status and cannot be excluded from the treatment of any social or political issue. Although debate continues on whether postmodernism should have a capital P, or whether it only deserves subsumation under 'modernism' (for example see Daniel 1995), it has become a "... general sign of radical technique concerning styles of discourse and research" (Marcus 1991:1 in Slater 1994:87). Within the social sciences, the shift to a postmodern framework has centred around three related issues (Keith and Pile 1993a): first, the relationship between time, space and action; second, the construction of identity, and, third, the potential of a politics based on the new ways of conceptualising identities. From these three issues a 'new cultural politics of difference' has emerged around which issues of identity and ethnicity have been framed (West 1990, Gilroy 1993). With regard to the prioritisation of these issues in research agendas, some have commented on what they perceive as the replacement of 'what is to be done?', a question which seeks equality for all, with the puerile, individualistic task of examining 'who am I?' (see Bourne 1987:1). Badcock (1996) for example laments what he sees as a turn away from collective projects of equality to issues of identity. However, as Mason (1995:3) notes "... inequalities ... derive in part from the conceptualization of difference *as a problem*" (original emphasis). The project of re-conceptualising difference, exposing the



knowledges which legitimize the dominant representation of the 'other' and allowing the 'other' to take control of representation of themselves, should be seen as integral to an informed politics of difference from which issues of inequality can be addressed (see Wicker 1997a). Indeed, one of the more recent outcomes of the 'new cultural politics of difference' has been an attempt at a re-conceptualisation of modes of oppression, based formerly on the parochial, usually singular, categories of race, class, gender, and so on, utilising a strategic deconstruction of the essentialised 'other'. Related to this, there has been a deconstruction and analysis of the politics of the binary positions that were employed in the past to describe difference, such as white/black, man/woman, centre/margin and so on (Soja and Hooper 1993). Even more recently a deconstruction of the monolithic 'white identity' has been taking place (Frankenburg 1993, Bonnett 1996, 1997, Nakayama and Martin 1999).

In practice, however, the refutation of 'race' and 'class' as natural categories has not been echoed in the re-conceptualisation of culture and ethnicity (Radcliffe 1997). Although ethnicity, gender, and other easily used social categories have for some time been seen as socially constructed (White and Jackson 1995), Harvey (1993) has argued that too often these differences are merely 'tagged on' to other categories, such as class. Other commentators have left the construction of difference as a conclusion, without rigorous analysis of the process of that construction in particular contexts (Taussig 1993). The dynamics of difference itself, and other social constructions, such as integration and exclusion, have continued to be written about as immutable conditions, rather than those created in different forms in different contexts.

An important consequence of the maturation of the 'cultural politics of difference' has been the breakdown of the 'rainbow coalition' of ethnic identities that were subsumed under the generalisation 'black'. As expressed by a character in Meera Syal's film *'Bhaji on the beach'* (1995): "Black don't mean not-white anymore". The dismantling of a politics based on the

homogenisation of racial, ethnic, class, and sexual differences may be considered politically beneficial for subsumed groups. However, one consequence of the end of the 'innocent notion of the essential black subject' (Hall 1996), and the subsequent refocusing of black as African/African-American/Afro-Caribbean/Black-British, rather than as 'racialised other', is that it has tended to leave other ethnic groups on the side lines. This neglect of less visible or less vocal ethnic groups, has been further compounded by the dawn of a new phase of black politics. This phase has led to the emergence of what Stuart Hall (1996) describes as a self confident autonomous black identity, within both academia and urban culture. At the same time, terms such as 'black', 'minority' and 'Asian' continue to be used in much of the social studies literature to represent a range of identities and subjectivities, often with a schizophrenic desire to simultaneously embrace and reject notions of difference across and within 'black' groups. Because of this very diversity, while 'Asian' youths have continued to be represented variously as deviant, 'distanced' from the rest of society, at odds with their cultural traditions, and so on, detailed studies of 'Asianess' have proved problematic, precisely because of the range of subjectivities enclosed within the category 'Asian'. Thus Ratcliffe (1997:18) has commented upon:

... the nonsense perpetrated in some sections of the research literature that South-Asians constitute a meaningful group for purposes of analysis. Their settlement patterns are markedly different, their migration histories, in terms of volume, nature and timing vary significantly, and [...] their social class profiles and general economic and material well-being are radically at variance.

While some commentators accept that the term South-Asian encompasses a range of different experiences (e.g. Brah 1992), the terms 'British-Asian', 'Asian' or 'South-Asian', continue to be used regularly and unproblematically, without further substantiation and deconstruction (e.g. Drew et al 1992). Although there is quite a wide literature on South-Asians in the UK, many have been 'community' or location based, with an overwhelming focus on Bangalis, and racism

in the East-End of London or on other inner-city areas (e.g. Husbands 1983, Cohen and Baines 1988, Ball and Solomos 1990, Cohen 1993, Jacobs 1996, Keith 1996). Moreover, the vast majority of studies have focused on working-class communities, so obscuring the wide range of different class positions of British-Asians (Bachu 1993).

The growing wealth of literature on identity in the fields of Geography, Critical Theory and Cultural Studies has helped open up issues that now need to be explored. However, it has been suggested that the theorisation of 'culture', 'difference' and 'race' have in many cases remained just that; abstract theory with the capability to confuse more than clarify (Dwivedi 1996a). Even the popularity of 'ethnicism' has been accused of reasserting the essentialist logic under a different guise; namely that of a "... shared culture in a historic sense" (Brah 1992:130). The primacy of racial factors in some cases has merely been replaced with the primacy of 'ethnic' factors (Cornell 1996). Many critics of concepts of 'race' have fallen into the same trap they deplore, by conceptualising ethnicity as a 'naturalised' social category (Marable 1993). Rather than colour or phenotypic characteristics, which were previously seen as the racial commonality, now language, regional origins, traditions, etc., are often pointed to as the defining components of ethnicity. Conceptually, the step taken has been small. As we shall see later, the notions that informed racial essentialism, including that of a shared cultural distinctiveness, are still in operation, but have been re-labelled, re-boxed and re-sold as the '*social group*' - ethnicity (Smith 1988, Gouldebourne 1998, Baumann 1999). A biological concept of race is all too often replaced with a sociological concept of race.

However, some theorists, starting with an exposure of the precarious nature of colour/racial/cultural/ethnic commonality assumptions have made way for the conceptualisation of 'ethnicity' and 'identity', as the alignment of 'self' in society through difference and relational interaction (e.g. Wallman 1986, Hall 1991, Rattansi 1994). However,

theorisation of processes of ethnicity, identity (re)formation and identity related to social context has remained largely unlinked to 'social realities'. As Les Back (1996:4) points out:

There is little in the cultural studies literature that attempts to describe the cultural dynamics of new ethnicities at the level of everyday life. Rather the work of Stuart Hall offers a series of heuristic and informed meditations on the state of the politics of race in Britain.

The existing literature remains polarised between accounts of a 'social melting pot' and the ever increasing marginalisation of particular groups. Young people, arguably those who are the subjects of the 'new ethnicities' (e.g. Hall 1992b, Alund 1997), or the 'Third Space' (Bhabha 1990b) or 'intermezzo culture' (Back 1994, 1996), that have been suggested by some cultural theorists, have been under-focused in cultural studies research, while general theorising continues. As Lavie and Swedenburg (1996:18) put it:

The cultural materials analyzed through the modalities of 'the third', however have tended to be highly stylised domains of knowledge, framed as dramatic, literary, cinematic, artistic, and musical texts. Bridging ethnography, cultural studies, and minority discourse will be possible if we incorporate the primary daily realities from which such textual representation emerge.

Taylor (1998) also notes gushing prose on 'fragmentation', 'hybridization', and ontological and categorical identities, without any kind of grounding or linking to social groups or individuals. At this level, theory adds little and could be harmful to our understanding (Amit-Talai and Knowles 1996). The addition of yet another theoretical position may capture attention because of its politically correct or postmodern content, but may have little link to social realities. Two of the foremost theorists of 'new ethnicities' are also two of the biggest culprits in this regard. Chrisman (1997) notes that on the cover of *The Black Atlantic*, Gilroy (1993) writes: "... there is a culture that is not specifically African, American, Caribbean, or British, but all of these at once: a black Atlantic culture whose themes and techniques transcend ethnicity and nationality to produce something new ..". His description, Chrisman contends, does little more than capture recent trends in cultural studies that seek to highlight the syncretic nature of young

ethnic identities. Homi Bhabha (1990b:211) too, writes of the virtues of the cultural melange: "... the importance of hybridity is not to be able to trace two original moments from which the third emerges, rather hybridity is the 'third space' which enables other positions to emerge". Neither of these authors indicate from where they have formulated their theories, or explain how this 'third space' is lived out by young people (see also Sparks 1996 critique of Stuart Hall's work). The literature in this regard has been largely celebratory rather than critical (Amit-Talai and Knowles 1996). As Keith and Pile (1993b:33) point out:

... in the recent work of bell hooks, Stuart Hall, Paul Gilroy, Homi Bhabha and others, descriptions of the hybridity of contemporary cultural politics invoke only a sympathetic *celebration* of the syncretism that is happening 'out there' in the real world.

This uncritical celebration has been linked to the great love that has recently developed, both within academia and within other discursive spaces, of work written by/on exile(s) on the trauma, displacement, longing and looking back of the émigré (Connell, King and White 1995). Similar notions of 'fracture' and 'fragmentation' have been applied to immigrant communities in much of the hybridity/third space literature. It appears that the 'transculturated' object/subject has become the darling of the western intelligentsia (Coombes 1994). This tendency to romanticise the experiences of immigrants and their children as exilic is ungrounded. Potentially, it is simply another form of exoticisation by the intellectual community. As such, the spaces of representation that the post-colonial novel and academia itself occupy, have hogged much of the limelight in cultural studies (Amit-Talai and Knowles 1996, Sparks 1996.). Keith and Pile (1993b:32) suggest that: "... this arena is itself a product; to confine consideration within its privileged boundaries is to tell only half the story". Although we will not venture into this in this study, these spaces deserve a deconstruction of their own to unpack the ethical, epistemological, and other impulses that have created the current vogue for identity politics. Furthermore the *linking* or *unlinking* of this space of representation to others is essential for the theorisation of an informed and embracing politics of difference.

At the other end of the spectrum lie a plethora of empirical studies on ethnic identities, that often employ quantitative or basic qualitative methodologies (Eade 1989 and Bauman 1996 are notable exceptions). Some of these studies, through the large number of respondents they reach, may claim to 'represent' a wider population, but often lack the depth that is necessary when exploring issues as complex as those of identity and ethnicity (e.g. Anwar 1998). For example, in studying changing ethnic identities, Modood and colleagues (1994:4) claim: "... one step forward from previous small-scale studies towards a more comprehensive understanding". However, their claim to provide a 'comprehensive understanding' of ethnicity and identity from such cursory data as that collected from one-off group discussions and semi-structured interviews, is theoretically misinformed or more than a little optimistic. As Hall (1991) notes, we cannot understand identity simply by adding up the sum of our positions. To arrange identities in the way that Modood and associates' work had done; I am primarily Pakistani, then British, then Muslim, and so on, does not forward our understanding of the process of identification. As Lareau and Shultz (1996) stress that even work carried out using ethnographic methods such as participant observation and in-depth interviewing over a short time cannot obtain a rich understanding of the settings. What is needed, they suggest, is a study of identity that examines its creation within its social context.

Viewed in this light, few studies have so far bridged the gap between empirical reductionism and theoretical abstraction. Many have also confined themselves to particular aspects of identity such as locality or gender; which in themselves cannot be separated from the whole. Similarly, although there have been in-depth studies on vernacular cultures (e.g. Verkuyten 1997), many are conducted in one particular 'context' or social space, as seen for investigations of music cultures (Gilroy 1991, 1993, Back 1993, Gopinath 1995, Neer 1995, Lusane 1993) or of the street or youth centres (Miller 1993, Back 1996). This means that

findings are relevant only for a particular context. They are not compared to other social spaces (for notable exceptions see Alexander 1996, Wulff 1988). Such non-contextual analyses of identity prevail in work on ethnic identities in the cultural studies literature. This is linked to the way culture and identity are conceptualised more generally within the social sciences. In the next section aspects of this are examined by exploring recent trends in theorising the terms 'race', 'ethnicity', 'identity' and 'subjectivity', which are fundamental to theorising young British-Asian identities.

### **Race, Culture or Ethnicity? Identity or Subjectivity?**

Critics say that one of the great problems of cultural studies is that many of the concepts and terms explored and analysed have such ephemeral meanings that it is difficult to know what is being referred to (Fiske 1992, D'hondt et al 1995). 'Identity' and 'culture' are two of the terms that can induce headaches for cultural geographers, as not only have concepts surrounding them changed significantly as social theory has progressed, but they remain constantly contested (Davies 1995). In some of the cultural studies literature, the terms identity, subjectivity, and in particular culture and ethnicity, seem sometimes not only to be related, but to be used interchangeably, depending on who is using them and in what context (Wolff 1991, Zeitlin 1996). Before we may refer to culture, or identity or ethnicity in this study, it is necessary to outline recent concepts for these terms.

#### **Race, ethnicity and culture**

In recent years there has been a growing interest in social exclusion, which, arguably, is founded implicitly on the notion of fundamental ethnic or cultural difference. Partly because of this interest, and because of growing ethnic assertion by groups around the world, 'ethnicity' has gained much political importance (Stolcke 1995). However, even in the academic literature,

culture has often been confused with ethnicity, and ethnicity confused with race (Mason 1995). The myriad contexts of use of these terms have not been adequately explained (Saggar 1993, Cornell 1996). The use of 'ethnicity' merely as a euphemism for 'race' may be a practice that has been laid to rest, but the inadequacies of some alternative working definitions of 'ethnicity' are plainly apparent. Allen and Macey (1994) note that many of the notions that guided racial essentialism, for example that of cultural distinctiveness, are still present in some conceptualisations of ethnicity (see also Abu-Lughod 1993). Yet in some cases commentators have covered great distances in working through alternative conceptualisations. This is apparent, for example, in the work of Sandra Wallman, whose views have moved from seeing little difference between race and ethnicity (1979), to viewing race as just one potential resource for ethnic collectivity (1986) (see discussion in Jenkins 1997). Banks (1996:2) has written of his own confusion over the numerous ways in which ethnicity has been conceptualised and employed in the social sciences:

Even a cursory glance at the literature reveals that there are several authors - past and present - who have written in apparent ignorance of the work of the other authors who claim to be writing about the same issue. One occasionally gets the sense that the wheel has been invented several times over.

Disregarding older theories based on racial determinism, there are two main strands of thought regarding ethnicity; that of the primordialists and that of the instrumentalists (Romanucci-Ross and De Vos 1995, also the discussion in Esman 1994). The primordial view, most famously expounded by Geertz (1963) and van den Berghe (1981), centres around the idea that ethnicity is a reflection of primordial loyalties to a particular social group with (real or imagined) common origins, such as religion, ancestry or culture (e.g Smith 1986). This ethnic identity is instilled at a young age and passed down from generation to generation. Within this conception, the collective identity is so rooted in historical experience that the group should be treated as a 'given', without the need for analysis of boundary construction and maintenance. This view has



been criticised for its ahistorical approach based on the assumption that people have unchanging, primal attachments to a social group, however that group may be defined and demarcated (Watson 1977).<sup>1</sup> This view has been accused of lending support to discriminatory practices through its naturalisation of ethnic groups. The other main school of thought, within which the work of Barth (e.g. 1969) has been guiding (although his earlier work was criticised for its primordialist tendencies by Cohen (1974)), is that of the instrumentalists. They assert that there is little historical continuity in the ethnic identity of groups; that both boundaries and objectives of groups shift. Thus Hall (1992:257), following this line of thought, proposes that ethnicity cannot be seen as unchanging:

If the Black subject and Black experience are not stabilised by Nature or by some other essential guarantee, then it must be the case that they are constructed historically, culturally, politically- and the concept that refers to this is ethnicity.

Esman (1994 ) also puts forward that ethnicity is shaped by the opportunities and threats of the socio-political and economic environment. Change is proposed to occur because ethnicity is an adaptive strategy, serving self-interests. Thus, the boundaries of a group change according to context, being activated by and adapting to threats and opportunities. Ethnicity, in this view is seen as a politics, which is created by and manifests itself in a relational framework. As commentators have recently argued, this means everyone has an ethnicity (e.g. see Bonnet 1997, McGuinness 2000). The three factors of history, culture and politics which Hall outlines, are manifest so differently in individuals' experiences. Consequently, it may not be possible to

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<sup>1</sup> This concept of ethnicity is still in wide usage, for example in the persistence of the classification of certain British groups as 'ethnic minorities'. The majority ethnic group is seen to be those who are 'white', and the minority groups are those who are not. This usage of 'ethnicity' merely replaces race, colour or territorial origin.

categorise people according to this concept of 'ethnicity', as it does not show a significant departure from the concept of subjective identity. However, a distinction has to be made between what has been commonly termed as an 'ethnic' *category* and an *ethnic group*. As Watson (1977:11) points out:

Welsh in England and Scots in Canada may represent identifiable categories but, unless they interact on a regular basis or form an association, it is unlikely that they will ever constitute a group.

He puts forward that an important factor in the constitution of ethnicity, which is that it can change or be modified according to economic or political circumstances. For Watson, ethnic alliances and loyalties change according to best interests, functioning similarly to 'informal interest groups'. This conception of ethnicity implies that 'ethnicity' only has meaning when two or more groups are interacting and competing for resources. Watson (1977:10) uses the following example to illustrate this:

... there is an obvious difference between the ethnic consciousness generated by a group of Latvians who meet periodically to dance in London and the ethnic allegiance manifested by Northern Ireland Catholics.

Power relations and fluid boundaries have been suggested to be a crucial dimension of ethnicity by more recent commentators as well (Wallman 1986, Rex and Mason 1986, Allen and Macey 1994), all of whom note that ethnicity always implies one or more 'other' ethnicities.

However, at the risk of sounding as if I am expounding the primordialist view, ethnic identity often coincides with 'regional identities', such as Pakistani, Bangladeshi or Asian, or with religious identities, because these categories have such a strong impact on the lives of those who are born or practice under them. In this respect, Jenkins (1997) argues that there is little difference between some primordialist and instrumentalist views. He notes that the

primordial commitment to a group may not be based on natural similarities, but these similarities (and differences) may *seem* natural to the individual and group. While agreeing with the instrumentalist proposition that an ethnicity is flexible and context dependent, he notes that: "However, we cannot deny the longevity and stubbornness, in certain circumstances of ethnic attachments" (Jenkins 1997:11). One of these recalcitrant, constructed similarities, I will argue later, is phenotypic characteristics, such as skin pigmentation or 'colour'. The tenacity and longevity of certain similarities or differences persist precisely because they continue to create interest groups, rather than some abstract feeling of collectivity. In this sense, phenotypic characteristics persist as a basis for ethnic collectivity because of their constructed importance; as 'race', and because of the politics that arise with this social construction. As Jenkins (1997), drawing on Weber, suggests, a belief in common origins does not cause the formation of a collective grouping. Rather it is through collective interests that commonalties are drawn on and a collective grouping arises (also see Swedburg 1999). Collective interests thus do not simply "... reflect or follow from similarities and differences between people, the pursuit of collective interests does, however, encourage ethnic identification" (Jenkins 1997:10).

So we arrive at a conceptualisation of ethnicity which emphasises the way in which the boundary of an ethnic group is constructed and negotiated with changing objectives (Wallman 1986). Ethnicity is not created in some abstract way around subjective commonalties, but subjective commonalties may be constructed or drawn upon by an interest group. Ethnicity describes a social relationship that occurs out of identification with a collectivity, making a group or community of interest. If an ethnic group is constantly recreated according to social relations (Baumann 1996), then it is situational and will change within different contexts, depending upon the politics of interaction.

Culture has often been put forward as one of the interest criteria that may define an ethnic group. Indeed, culture is often confused with 'ethnicity' (Mason 1995) The growing interest in culture, illustrated by the cultural turn in geography, has been echoed in other academic and intellectual arenas. The notion of culture has been appropriated by some quasi-scientific disciplines in a bid to insert a 'human element' into the sciences. However, the inclusion of a cultural element has been executed in some disciplines in the same manner as other 'static' factors functioning in a system. For example, in *'How culture works'*, Bohannan (1995:3) writes that: "... the rules of culture are an extension of the rules of matter and life". What Bohannan does not mention is how they are made, and who makes and keeps these 'rules of culture'. He refers to culture as if it is a natural phenomenon, directing but not created by social action. The human agency in his concept of 'culture' is not apparent.

As such, culture is often seen as something with rules and objectives that you can be a member of. Many older definitions of 'culture' used in the social sciences are also based on outdated concepts such as biological essentialism, although today a wide range of definitions of culture are in operation. Yet Mitchell (1995), amongst others, has argued that even cultural geographers continue to grapple with culture as if it were a thing in itself, from which 'cultural explanations' for social phenomenon can be sought. (Baumann 1999:25) similarly notes the still widespread view that "... comprehends culture as the collective heritage of a group, that is, as a catalogue of ideas and practices that shape both the collective and the individual lives of members. Culture thus appears as a mould that shapes lives". As Bachu (1993:108-109) has pointed out, an assumption in the British literature is that the crucial determinants of Asian identities are the nurturing forces of a 'homeland culture'. Indeed, a wealth of literature on ethnic minority groups takes great pains to describe the supposed cultural practices that exist. The emphasis has been on ethnicity as a tangible 'object', handed down through 'timeless' cultural practices (Duncan and Ley 1993), and not on ethnicity as expressed through

commonalities, of which culture may be just one. Moreover, there has been a deleterious persistence, even in the cultural studies literature, of a spatio-cultural contiguity, where certain places are purported to 'house' particular homogenous cultures (Carter et al 1993, Caglar 1997).

Williams (1981) and Wolff (1991) note two main uses of the word 'culture'. The first, somewhat older definition emphasises an 'informing spirit of a whole way of life'. This is assumed to be apparent across a variety of social activities but especially in 'specifically cultural activities', such as art, intellectual work and language. The other definition embraces 'a whole social order', within which specifiable cultural styles, including those of art, literature and intellectual work, are produced by an order constituted by other social activities, where the "... order is virtual: it is realised only as events of speech and action" (Hastrup 1996:17). A combination of these two approaches has led to the sociological view of culture as a distinct way of life, with a signifying system involved in all forms of social activity. It is these signifying 'idioms', the material expressions of culture, that are often mistaken for 'culture itself' (Watson 1977).

An important contribution to the definition of culture has been Geertz's (1973) explanation. This has been adopted by many working within the cultural studies discipline. Geertz views culture not as an objective entity, but as interpretative and contextual. Culture as a context recognises that there are structures or a framework of meanings, values and accepted practices that are created and shared by a group of people. Like a Kuhnian paradigm, it is a way of perceiving the world; a set of structures from which to order and interpret, which relate to the actions and objectives of the group. From this perspective culture constantly changes, since it is firmly grounded in a particular socio-economic and historical moment (see also Duncan and Duncan 1996), and is seen as processual in that it is constitutive of and by intersubjective action (Baumann 1999, Wicker 1997a). This definition does not say that a 'cultural background'

is shared by people who speak the same language or come from the same region. Nor does this interpretation preclude the possibility of different individual outcomes within a 'cultural framework' or from one understanding or operating within multiple cultural frameworks. The ability of individuals to shift between cultural world-views would be a form of identification or identity (Young 1990a). When these identifications are made in relation to a collectivity, this is what constitutes an 'ethnicity'. What this view of culture does suggest is that, in *whatever way*, there is a shared set of meanings and values within a group, that are constantly created, contested, reformulated, and reproduced, regardless of how this sharing comes about. By viewing culture as a constantly negotiated framework, as something that we 'make and do', rather than 'have', oppositional and resistancial cultural practices are not rendered invisible, but are part of the processual nature of culture (see Rose 1994, Baumann 1999).

As we have already noted, culture may be just one of a range of potential sources of ethnic identification. What is for sure is that culture, the system through which meanings are produced and reproduced, and ethnicity, the group identity of those with (real or imagined) commonalities, of which culture may be one, are by no means static states that determine behaviour, interpretation and interaction. Ethnicity, as I have already argued, is a conceptual category created through the construction of 'difference'. It does not relate to a specific group of characteristics of traits or ways of being, and its reference shifts constantly (Hastrup 1996). The differences drawn upon in the creation of an ethnicity can be constructed differently at different times. What is important is to see why and how this process of labelling, boundary construction and group association takes place. Culture and ethnicity cannot provide explanations of social action, but need, themselves, to be explained within the context of social action (Mitchell 1995). In the final section in this chapter, on space and place, I will suggest what these 'contexts of social action' might be, and why it is important to ground the study of identity and ethnicity within the social contexts that create them. But first, I will attempt to work through the primary

'unit' of ethnicity, that of the individual. In the next section I review recent suggestions for a way in which to view the subject and her/his subjectivity and identifications, and the way in which they relate to ethnicity.

### **Identity and subjectivity**

The rejection of the modernist conception of the 'bounded self', which is still employed in some of the social as well as much of the natural sciences, as well as in wider western society, is the starting point of much postmodern thought. This has been explored in depth in several places so it is not necessary to provide a critique here (for example, see Lloyd 1984, Bordo 1987). Significantly though, the shift to a postmodern conceptualisation of self has brought with it some important contributions to the conceptualisation of identity. The anti-essentialist spearhead of postmodern thinking opposes the idea of a fixed essential black identity, and asserts instead that identities cannot be universally true for all times and places, nor all people. This is because identities are socially constructed. Rhetorically this is all very well, but to take this postmodern assumption one step further is to challenge its own epistemological framework. 'Societal influences' must be broken down into smaller parts in order to expose the different factors that play a part in the formulation of an individual identity. However, anti-essentialist logic dictates that factors or influences cannot be identified or separated from the whole without risking naturalistic explanations (Rattansi 1992). This paradox in anti-essentialism leads to indeterminacy, and reveals one of the major flaws of postmodern thinking (Malik 1996). Nevertheless, as a general framework for analysis, postmodernism contributes significantly to the conceptualisation and analysis of identity by enabling a break-away from culturally or (primordial) ethnically deterministic explanations of social action. It encourages us to place social action firmly in its social context.

As such, much current commentary has come to view self as fundamentally relational and framed through experience and interaction (e.g. Burkitt 1994, Hall 1991, 1996). The 'self', it is suggested, operates in two spheres, that of subjectivity and that of identity. Although the use of 'identity' has become a tokenism in social research over a wide variety of issues, interestingly, subjectivity of the researched (as opposed to the researcher) is not often mentioned in the study of identity outside of social psychology, let alone granted importance in social interaction (Pile and Thrift 1995). This, perhaps, has been the result of early criticism and an accusation of a turn to 'irrelevant' individual psychologies levied at humanistic geographers who were researching the micro-scale (e.g. see Gould 1976). However, if we are to argue against culturalist explanations of social action, then an acknowledgement of subjectivity is important. According to Pile and Thrift (1995:5) subjectivity can be described as the result of the many different influences and personal experiences of an individual, which are: "... constantly reinterpreted and weaved together to form an ever-changing fabric". The co-ordinates of subjectivity are foci for the coming together of social relations (Pile and Thrift 1995, Thrift 1996). The configuration of these foci are constantly shifting through different 'subject' positions/contexts. As Grossberg (1988:384), so eloquently describes:

Subjects are like 'commuters' moving between different sites of daily life, who are always mobile but for whom the particular mobilities or stabilities are never guaranteed.

Within this conceptualisation, nothing about the co-ordinates of subjectivity is stable. The security of subjectivity is precisely the ability to transmutate and change. Subjectivities are whimsical, and are rarely the same twice.

The relevance of subjectivity to identity construction is difficult to explore, and has consequently been left out of much analysis of identity. 'Identity' has been suggested as being based on the subjectivity of an individual, however identity is relational and therefore always



political (Smith 1995). It involves the recognition, construction, affirmation and rejection of difference (Mouffe 1994). As Sarup (1995) notes, identity is constructed through interaction between people, institutions and practices. Identity refers to a *politics* that involves the recognition of one's subjectivity, that is, the inclination of one's experience in the presence of an 'other', upon which linkages are made, alliances are drawn and differences pinpointed. These differences can be in relation to another individual, group, geographical area, building, and so on. For Mouffe (1994:110):

Identity is, in effect, the result of a multitude of interactions that take place inside a space whose outlines are not clearly defined ... For an appropriate definition of identity, we need to take into account both the multiplicity of discourses and the power structure that affects it, as well as the complex dynamic of complicity and resistance which underlines the practices in which this identity is implicated. Instead of seeing the different forms of identity as allegiances to a place or as a property, we ought to realise that they are the stake of a power struggle.

Identity is therefore about how we 'make sense of ourselves' through other people and things (Rose 1995:87). It is intimately linked to power relations. However, since neither subjectivity nor identity are static, subjectivity formation will be affected by changing identity as well as the other way around. The two are in a state of flux. The difference is that they reside in different contexts. Individuals can identify simultaneously with different groups, and negotiate between them with relative ease. Deleuze's (1993) conception of identities and subjectivities is a very similar to that above; one of a complexity of symbolic and social forces, temporarily configured for periods of time, not upon a blank surface, but the surface itself is result of the interplay of these forces. The object relations theory as outlined by Mead (1934) and Burdett (1994) also fits nicely into a structure based on social relations. The positioning of 'self' is carried out through contextual representations of people and 'things', alongside a subsequent formulation of boundaries between these and self. The nuanced difference between this view and other object relations and theories, is that the boundary delineating the difference between the self and

externalities is not fixed but context dependent. As such, the make-up of the individual is placed firmly in the social and material world.

As we can see from the theorists above, roads have already been paved in the social sciences towards a conceptualisation of 'self' and 'identity' as shifting forms. In general, however, the analysis of identity in much of the social sciences has had little to do with the concepts of identity outlined above. More commonly, studies of identity have focused on shared 'ethnic' backgrounds (e.g. Khan 1977, Mankekar 1994). Very much like old anthropological methods, they have involved mainly thin description and a reliance on pre-formulated knowledge of the groups studied, sometimes gleaned from 'countries of origin' rather than questioning the basis of ethnicity, from which to infer theory (Bachu 1993, Duncan and Ley 1993). Ethnic individuals and groups are all too often seen as having packaged, 'ready to go' identities, based on the cultural influences of the 'homeland' (Bachu 1993). Kirby (1996:45) notes that more often than not:

Graphically, the 'individual' may be pictured as a closed circle: its smooth contours ensure its division from its location, as well as assuring its internal coherence and consistency. Outside lies a vacuum in which objects appear in their own bubbles, self-contained but largely irrelevant to this self-sufficient ego.

The enlightenment individual, the dual subject, the Cartesian subject, the *Ego*, or whatever, are all based on the belief of a coherent rational individual in a non-conflictual, even non-interactional relationship with an external, consistent, static environment, both of which delineations make it possible for us to 'map' the self and identity (see Blom 1999). 'Structural' approaches, which stress the importance of institutional structures to the study of identity, are now recognised as lacking in human-agency. Within these types of approach, the individual continues to be studied as an inert body, subject only to the detached laws of social structures. On the other hand, 'agency' approaches see the body as self-contained, a unit where decisions,

choices, values and opinions are logically formed in a 'self' vacuum, completely doing away with links to society and organisation (McCarthy 1998). A holistic, identity approach would seek to negotiate the spaces between the two, to elucidate the relationship between structures and body. In the same way in which gender and sexuality are seen as maintained, reproduced or reformed (e.g. see Duncan 1996), so should there be a similar conception of identities as constructed and reconstructed with differing social relations.

An 'identity approach' of the type suggested above (e.g. Giddens 1979, 1984, Bhaskar 1979, Bourdieu 1990), has two advantages for the study of interaction and integration/exclusion. First, 'action' is contextualised at the level of the individual (Gutting 1996) but not only the individual that is the focus of study, but others, whose social relations play a part in the formation of the individual's identity. Hence, all individuals are seen as being informed through formal and informal social structures. Second, the formation of identities and the behaviour of individuals is located in a social (cultural, economic and political) context. The combination of these two forms attempts to overcome the structure or agency dualism (Gutting 1996). However, the difficult part is to operationalise this concept of identity in research methodology. It is still a little too abstract to use as a working concept (Silverman 1998). How and why does identity change? What purpose does this serve? To answer these questions and to set the definition of identity used in the study, we must turn to psychological understandings of the concept. Erikson (1950, 1968), seen as one of the founders of ideas on personal identity, describes identity as based on 'sameness and difference', so giving a sense of internal coherence and affinity in relation to other people. The reference to 'a sense of affinity' gives us a clue to the reason why identity is so important, both to groups and to individuals. This point is drawn out by Head (1997:10), who defines identity development as a dynamic, evolving process of "... making choices which allow one to live effectively", through the deployment of a 'functional life-script'. Head suggests that identity is a necessary component of

all social interaction. It is a guide in making decisions and taking action. A shift to viewing identities as contextual, and thus changing, has opened up further issues.

Some theorists, following this line of thought have argued that identities are 'incomplete', 'fragmented', 'hierarchical', or that an individual may have 'multiple' identities (e.g. see Young 1990a, Hall 1992b, Gilroy 1993, Keith and Pile 1993b, Jenkins 1997, and also some theorists of 'mixed race' identities; Nakashima 1992, Zack 1995). But to say that identity is hierarchically organised implies that identities can be separated and unlinked from each other, forming separate coherent units. It negates the situational nature of identities, created by complex social relations. Mason (1995:13), for example, notes that: "... it is possible to be simultaneously English, British, European, stressing these identities more or less strongly in different aspects of daily life". This implies that these are pre-formulated, coherent identities that are 'brought out' in the appropriate contexts. But what about the endless ways in which these intersect with each other, and with other possible identifications drawn out through the process of distinguishing similarity and difference? This suggestion of 'multiple' identities, although a step away from the static view of an unchanging identity, nevertheless contributes to the view of identities as reified. Liz Bondi (1993), writing of developments within feminist commentary, has also suggested that the recognition of identities as 'multiple' has relied on essential categorisation. She notes that: "Reliance upon apparently pre-given categories of class, sexual orientation, race, ethnicity, and so on invoked a concept of identity as something to be acknowledged and uncovered, rather than constructed, as some thing fixed rather than changing" (Bondi 1993:93). The danger is not necessarily in the concepts used, but in the limitations of the term itself. Identity is a noun, and so conveys fixity, disabling expression of the provisional, negotiated nature of identities, of the way they are temporary and fleeting, both constitutive and constituting a social space. As Thrift and Pile (1995) note regarding their use of the term 'mapping', there is a difficulty mapping something that is not stable or precisely

bounded. Indeed, we do not live or act within the neat, bounded categories we use to classify groups. Recognising the complexity here, Parr and Philo (1995:210) employ the term 'fractured identities' but write that:

... we would nonetheless wish to press home the claim that for most people identity is actually a much more messy and indistinct stance on self, other and world than the standard 'atomistic' model of the human subject can ever allow. ... honest recognition of the chaos present in the dynamics of individual identity challenges many academic disciplines - it places serious question marks against simplistic treatments of social groups and their collective identities.

Taking these suggestion into account, I will use the term identification, as proposed by Moerman (1974) and Baumann (1996), in order to convey the infinite range of possibilities that are the outcome of the politics of social relations. The term identity will be used for the indescribable result of identification through social relations, artificially fixed in time. Using the concept of identity as identification with the infinite range of interests that the 'other' does or does not represent, allows us to leave behind culturally deterministic explanations. Moreover, this conceptualisation enables us to go beyond the mapping of identities as static forms. However, if we rid our identity of stasis, we must reassess the usefulness of other terms used to convey the nature of identification (Smith and Katz 1993). With a concern for this, I now turn to space and place and the way these are conceptualised in relation to identities.

## **Space, place and identity**

### **Overview**

With the importance of 'place' firmly back on the social sciences agenda, there has been concern with the ways locality and place play a role in the formation of identities. The main strands of thought on this have attempted to demonstrate the ways specific localities create particular identities, and how these lived spaces are in turn created by the social groups that

inhabit them (e.g. see Keith 1995, or Anderson and Gale 1992). This follows from the general belief that "... the built environment of spaces reflects and embodies the experience and values of the social group that maintains it and also defines that group" (Sibley 1995:98). Until a recent deconstruction, the return to local-level spatial analysis in geography has busied itself mainly with studies of inner-city areas, which has lead to the 'racialisation' of urban politics (Cohen 1993). At the same time, many areas, both outside and inside the urban context, have been under-focused by geographers studying issues of race, and have been left to the postmodern assumption of 'no-place' spaces (Watt 1998). More recent analyses have moved beyond the notion of coherent physical spaces and have examined how the meaning of places are contested and negotiated (e.g. Mitchell 1992, 1996, Rose 1994, Lees 1997).

But place and space are slippery customers. Much of the conceptualisation of place, especially with regard to identity, is closed within delineated boundaries, which are all too often arbitrarily drawn (Massey 1994). Moreover, with the impetus behind the focus on place coming from Marxist geography (Dear 1997), there has been a tendency to essentialise place as a manifestation of capital power, production, and consumption relations (e.g. Giddens 1981). This has left the recovery of place in geography almost synonymous with the search for 'spaces of authenticity' (Jackson 1989, Jackson and Penrose 1993, Massey 1994). Various conceptualisations of space and processes of spatialisation have more recently been employed in geography and the social sciences, several of which relate to ideas about identity, although they have rarely been empirically employed in the study of identity. It is to these that I now turn.

### **Globalisation and the Scale of Space**

The phenomenon identified by some as 'globalisation', arguably an economically and culturally observable aspect of the shift to postmodernism and late capitalism, has often been considered

in the theoretical analysis of culture and identity (e.g. King 1991). Aside from the growing interdependence and interconnection of world markets (Beauregard 1995), a host of other changes have been attributed to this mega-process. These new global processes have been portrayed as 'unsettling', as giving rise to new national identities and cultural forms, as well as greater exchanges of goods, ideas and images. Cultures are often seen as caught between a desire for the material rewards depicted by global consumerism and recovering a lost purity or coherent identity (Robins 1991a, Massey and Jess 1995). For Rattansi (1994:28), globalisation leaves cultures:

... sensitive to new forms of hybridization, syncretism, fusion, difference and incommensurability, as cultural collectives, imaginations, fantasies and agencies are driven to rub up against each other, leading to fracturing and recomposition, a redrawing of boundaries, and the creation and recreation of new forms and antagonisms.

Globalisation has been attributed to the creation of new 'global' cultures, which are created from the mixing of different cultural impulses, or possibly, as some a little more cynically see it, the globalised Euro-American consumer cultures of MacDonalds and Hollywood, amongst others (Hall 1991). On the other hand, recent revivals of ethnic xenophobia and localism have been attributed to the growing identity crises inflicted by processes of globalisation (Ahmed and Shore 1995, Alund 1997, Wicker 1997a). Harvey (1989) is amongst those who have argued that new forms of life brought about by globalisation, such as the heightened spatial mobility he coined 'time/space compression', foster such a feeling of instability and uncertainty that they lead us to identify more strongly with place as a source of security and stability. Consequently, Harvey sees more engagement in personal and group identity construction based on locality. Morely and Robins (1993:5) on the other hand, suggest that the forces of globalisation, technological advance and time-space compression have upset the local so that "... places are no longer the clear supports of our identity".

From descriptions of 'globalisation' in the literature, there seems to be some exaggeration in trying to get across the novelty and results of this process. This is seen in the implication that, before the emergence of globalisation, cultures were unchanging and distinct, linked to particular places, and that new ideas were not passed from society to society. Several commentators have argued that the misconceived idea of culturally homogenous 'nations' is a thoroughly modern ideology associated with industrialisation (Gellner 1983, Smith 1986, Hobsbawm 1990). The reality is that the 'syncretism' of cultures has been a steady feature of most ethnic groups in the world, not only after the onset of the European imperialist mission. For example, in the space of a few centuries, parts of India witnessed the arrival of the Muhoguls, Arabs, Aryans, Greeks, British and the Portuguese, to name a few (Jussawallah 1995). At different times, and impacting on different areas in different ways, each brought a significant, and significantly different, cultural presence that today would be difficult to claim is anything except 'Indian'. Malinowski, also suggested that a new, distinct culture was being created by the meeting of European industrial urban cultures with traditional African rural cultures. He too stressed that it was not merely an appropriation or exchange of cultural traditions, but the production of new forms (referred to in Gouldbourne 1998).

It is not just the novelty that is exaggerated in many globalisation commentaries, but the notion of stasis and the inherent boundedness of cultures pre-globalisation (e.g. see Sarup 1994). What also seems to be overlooked in some commentaries is that global processes are themselves, in part, cultural. What only a few commentators specify is a difference between global processes that have been occurring for centuries and the contemporary nature of globalisation. Hall (1991) and Back (1996) are amongst those who identify new forms of globalisation. Hall (1991:23) suggests that these new forms: "... seem to go two ways simultaneously. It goes above and below the nation state. It goes global and it goes local in the same moment". The



return to the 'local' is what is suggested to happen when the homogenising nature of globalisation is rejected, and ethnicities again become a very strong source of identity.

On careful inspection, globalisation does seem to be characterised by contradiction and the existence of opposites (Morely and Robins 1993). The creation of transnational identities and the linking of lands and of people that have never met exist at same time as the resurgence of strong nationalisms and, as Harvey (1989) suggests, reinforced local communities. Other binaries, such as universalism/particularism, homogenisation/differentiation, centralisation/decentralisation and stability/instability flourish and jostle with each other within the globalised transformation of world cultures (Rattansi 1994:27). Back (1996) similarly suggests that 'new ethnicities' are partly produced through a tension between local and global forces. However, often these new local and trans-local identities remain only partially documented, with an overriding focus on the aggression of global forces and resistance of local actors (Benhabib 1992). As Beauregard (1995:232) notes of recent work on the local and the global: "In each instance, 'thinking globally' is privileged over 'thinking locally'. Dominance is conceded to actors and forces operating internationally, and local actors resist, adapt, or acquiesce but do not fundamentally alter global intrusions." As such, the contribution of the local to the global forces are often rendered invisible, obscuring the connection between the two and reifying these two scalar domains (see also Bachu 1996). Duncan (1993) and Thrift (1996), amongst others, assert that the social sciences continue to make scalar distinctions, for example between the micro and the macro, and, most recently, between the local and the global. The differences invoked in these scalarities, or even the connections implied, they suggest, are often left undiscussed. Thrift (1996) suggests that the spatially differentiated world which academics, not exclusively geographers, have created, is "... a world which, it is often assumed, has a relatively unproblematic connection with reality". Hastrup (1996:66) concurs that the social sciences have been taking scale for granted: "... the local and the global cannot

be studied as ontological entities interfacing somewhere in space. Scale has to be questioned along with any ethnographic description". As Strathern (1992) notes perspectives change with scale and context. Thus concepts like ethnicity and culture must be examined at different scales of space, because the essentiality we ascribe to the people these categories bound are likely to change with scale. This is because of the increasing complexity of social relations at greater scales. However, the arbitrary scalar representation of space itself needs to be qualified through linkage to social realities. If globalisation is to be attributed to the formation of new cultures and identities, we need to know how and why. Furthermore, the multiple fissures and particularistic sentiments that have emerged alongside globalisation cannot be separated from each other and have to be accounted for, as part of the same process.

### **Community, Identity and Place**

In the past, there has also been an identification of place with community, and the other way around (Johnston 1991). Agnew (1981, 1993) points out that contemporary social science, following an earlier intellectual trend, confuses the sociological concept of community with the geographical concept of place. Indeed, in their review of the community studies literature, Bell and Newby (1971:18) set as criteria for inclusion as 'community studies' work that is '... concerned with the study of inter-relationships of social institutions in a locality.' The community studies literature of the late 1960s and 1970s could easily be passed off as contemporary area studies; the difference between these two is not so great, despite proclamations of greater theoretical awareness in more recent locality studies (e.g. Cooke 1988). Some commentators have arrived at a more nuanced concept of 'community' (e.g. Dwyer 1999) which considers the effects of globalisation in connecting distanced groups and creating a concept of community as 'interest group', which rises above that of locality and neighbourhoods (Carter et al 1993, Dwyer 1999). However, some recent work has stressed the importance of locality in the creation of collective identities and communities (Revill 1993). It

has been suggested, for example, that an individual will be influenced by the 'place' they live in. Harvey (1989) proposed that the 'working-classes' are less spatially mobile than the middle-classes, and are therefore more likely to construct place-bound identities. Smith (1990:2) also believes in the strength of the 'territorial imperative' for all social groups, noting that: "Humankind establishes an identity with pieces of geographical space, and a sense of place, comparable with the deepest of emotional ties and feelings". The questions that arise from this 'identification with place' could include: how far does a place extend, should we measure it in terms of a street, neighbourhoods, boroughs, regions or countries? Smith (1990:3) continues, hinting at possible answers to the question above:

But it is easy to over-emphasise territory as a source of human identity, abstracting from the broader context in which such sentiments arise and are reproduced or changed ... Territoriality is, therefore, not some innate human trait but a social construct. It can take different forms in different geographical and historical circumstances, and its specific manifestations must be contextualised.

One might argue, then, that identification with a particular area occurs because it may have been the locus of past experiences or social networks, but what exactly does this have to do with the location of place? There is, according to Agnew (1987), a confusion between conceptions of place, especially in much writing in geography, where place is used synonymously with location, point, area and space (also Gregson and Lowe 1995). It is this confusion that has led recent intellectual thought to the idea of place solely as geographical location (Agnew 1987), or as real or imagined spaces (Entrikin 1991). Agnew (1993) proposes that there are three fundamentally different meanings to the word 'place'; as a location in spatial relation to other places; as a locale as the context of action and practices; and as a 'sense of place' in the structure of local feelings about a location. He notes there has been an over-emphasis in geography on space as 'location', and rarely, in any discipline, has work integrated the three approaches to place. As Massey (1991) and Revill (1993) suggest, places can have

multiple meanings and instead of being seen as bounded coherent spaces, places and the communities that live within them should be seen as fluid, contradictory, conflictual, transcending localities.

In support of the idea of a multiplicity of different types of place, in the *'Informational city'* Castells (1989) writes of new technologies, part of the process of globalisation that has created the space of flows of information, over-taking the meaning of the space of places. A frequent question asked in response to the mass of information on the shrinking of global space is concerned with whether heightened spatial mobility contributes towards either the uniqueness or the obliteration of 'geographical' space. As Massey (1994:154) writes:

Social space consists of all the networks and complexities of social interaction and interconnection, whether these be very small scale or global in their reach. In these times, social relations have become so stretched out and interconnected that it is difficult any more to distinguish within social space any coherent areas that might be called 'places'.

Massey's assertion seems to suggest that a 'place' is a space or a somewhere, a location where social relations are not so stretched out; somewhere that is not affected (or 'infected') by transitory relations. This seems to subscribe to the view of place as fundamentally physical, or more specifically a geographical phenomenon, that is now losing its geographical character on account of the greater interconnectedness between 'places'. But surely even before the 'stretching out' of social relations to which she refers, social relations existed within these 'coherent spaces', although perhaps on a smaller scale. Massey, even while calling for a re-conceptualisation of space, seems to lapse into the old conception of place as a distinct geographical area, rather than as space inscribed with meaning.

## **Spatial Methaphors**

Geographers cannot seem to shake the geographical out of space. Our geographical thinking remains powered by spatial imagery. As such, places, and the people that inhabit them, are often juxtaposed using clumsy metaphors. The use of spatial metaphors to describe social phenomena has increased considerably as theorists, unsettled by the uncertain world of post-structuralism, seek secure grounding in their fixed delineations (Keith and Pile 1993a, Smith and Katz 1993). Numerous concepts and topics are talked about using spatial metaphors: *'mapping'*, *'decentring'* and the *'positioning'* of individuals and social groups. As Hastrup (1996) notes, these metaphors, though perhaps innocently used, become *'extensions of reality'*. Identity in particular is often talked of in the social sciences using spatial metaphors (Mitchell 1995). Migrants are described as *'translated across cultures'*, as occupying a negotiated *'third space'* in their *'diasporic communities'*, and having *'trans-national'* identities. This type of spatial allusion, especially used in projects that seek to destabilise otherwise naturalised categories (such as race and gender), reinforce notions of spatial boundedness and spatio-cultural contiguity.

Many of these spatial metaphors are used by those who claim to be part of a political project of forging solidarity between social groups (e.g. Spivak 1987, Hall 1991, Hooks 1992, Bhabha 1994). Arguably, the first boundary that must be overcome is the mental boundary, the way we conceptualise our world. Although spatial metaphors have been exposed as being heavily gendered (Cosgrove and Domosh 1993), the way spatial metaphors lend themselves to essentialisations of difference has been little acknowledged, with social groups still referred to using such metaphors (Jackson 1989, Smith and Katz 1993). Agnew (1993:258) notes that metaphors are easily confused with analytical concepts: "One can start out using spatial concepts as shorthand for complex sociological processes but slip easily into substituting the spatial concepts for the more complex argument". *'Marginal groups'*, *'domains of difference'*,

'third space', 'voices speaking from the outside', are just a few examples of the terminology that has been used, seemingly quite unproblematically, in cultural studies and other social sciences. The use of such spatial metaphors relates to 'geographies of action' (Thrift 1996:16). Although the metaphors may not explicitly organise the groups referred to in a hierarchical manner, power relations are still present: left, right, centre, decentred, etc., denoting fixed socio-spatial power positions (see Sparkes 1994). These are not only spatial analogies but are political affirmations, where difference is the starting point that has to be negotiated from the 'interstices'. For example, Thrift and Pile (1995:19) note that there is a concern for capturing 'being' as a process of "... provisional and open ended movement" in the use of such metaphors. However, it could be argued that while the motives of this project are in place, the limits of the language used ensure it cannot capture this 'provisional and open ended movement'. Surely, while cultural geographers continue to argue that discourse creates meaning and defines the referent, others have not recognised that we cannot continue to use space as a delineator without running the risk of bounding our conception of identities within spatial limits, and within the current understanding of space.

Other commentators have noted the illusionary, politically troublesome nature of spatial metaphors. Thus, Foucault (1981:69) believes that spatial metaphors are strategically invoked, that they are used to carve up terrains of 'them', 'us' and 'another', creating battlefields out of abstract space. Smith and Katz (1993) also argue that spatial metaphors are problematic in that they describe space as an inert object in which things 'happen'. The use of such metaphors indicate that space is being conceived along the geometric lines of 'absolute' space, which is a container for something other than itself. It is often this 'other thing' that is the focus of the study. As such, "... spatial metaphors are problematic in so far as they presume that space is not" (Smith and Katz 1993:75). Some of the metaphors used very nearly tell you what shape the space is, and often tell you how far it extends. Thus Smith and Katz (1993) make a distinction

between 'metaphorical' space and 'real' space, arguing that the problem in using spatial metaphors resides in the confusion or mixing-up these two kinds of spaces. Other geographers hold similar views. For example, Harvey (1989) draws a distinction between real space and metaphorical space, as in reality and images of reality, while Liz Bondi (1992) draws a distinction between 'real' and 'symbolic' spaces. However, it is not possible to draw a corollary between all the 'real' spaces that geographers have theorised: cultural space, geographical space, social space, material space, concrete space, experienced space. These names for 'real' space are not readily interchangeable. Nor, on closer examination, can we see a difference between these different types of spaces. It is not possible to demonstrate with the use of examples that there is a clear distinction between a real and an imagined space. If there is no such clear distinction, asks Gillian Rose (1996), then are the definitions for these different types of spaces correct? Are there actually different kinds of spaces? The physicality of space, or places, for example buildings or parks, etc., does not embody meanings or messages in themselves. They do not hold and display a history. This is created by individuals, or rather individuals or groups in relation to that place. A place is relational and contextual rather than scalar or spatial. Appadurai (1995:204) sees it as a complex phenomenological quality, constituted by a series of links between "... the sense of social immediacy, the technologies of interactivity and the relativity of contexts". This phenomenological quality "... expresses itself in certain kinds of agency, sociality and reproducibility". This is distinct from what he defines as 'neighbourhoods', or actually existing social forms in which locality as a *dimension* or *value* is unevenly realised (Appadurai 1995:204).

### **Space and Social Relations**

And so on to a workable concept of place. Entrikin (1991) has argued that space should be seen as situated in-between subjective and objective realities, representing a context for social action. The discursive nature of place, the way it is constantly reproduced by all social relations

(Lefebvre 1990), has not been emphasised enough. In this context, Massey (1994:154) has called for a reinterpretation of space:

In this interpretation, what gives place its specificity is not some long internalised history, but the fact that it is constructed out of a particular constellation of social relations; meeting and weaving together at a particular locus.

Thus spaces are produced and reproduced everywhere. However, places are important. Carter and associates (1993:xii) suggest that the difference between place and space is that "... place is space to which meaning has been ascribed". Viewed in this light, places and their boundaries are created through meaning and social relations. The actual 'place' of space is a vector, playing host to the meeting of those relations, which otherwise, perhaps, could have taken place elsewhere, but are nonetheless constitutive of and constituted by the meanings of that place. However, recurring or similar spaces can be created independently of localities by the interaction of individuals who bring their own experiences and politics to create a 'social space'. As Soja (1989) purports, space is not an innocent or passive backdrop to social action. It too is imbued with politics and ideology. Space should be conceived as playing subjective 'host' to a number of different social spaces, "... an actively passive space where social structures and human agency meet" (Thrift 1996:79). Agnew (1987:27), amongst others, has argued against believing that the locality of place can be anywhere:

There is a sense in which locales [physical places] could be anywhere. However, they are not. They are *located* according to the demands of a spatially extensive division of labour and global system of material production and distribution.

But the spatially extensive division of labour and global system of material production and distribution *is* itself a manifestation of social relations. This may be on a scale that is regional, national or even global in scope. To quote from Massey (1993:79) again: "Interrelations between objects occur in space and time; it is these relationships themselves which



create/define space and time". In the same vein, Bhaskar (1993: 53) proposes that ".... all changes are spatio-temporal and space-time is a relational property of the meshwork of material beings". Thus space itself is not a fixed, absolute object, but is itself relational.

Time-space is fundamentally different from the space geographers have been analysing and incorporating into unfolding theory (Duncan and Ley 1993, Massey 1993). Places themselves, as cultural geographers have been arguing, can subjectively host a multiplicity of social spaces. Different 'types' of space can thus be created within the same physicality. There are 'intellectual spaces', 'moral spaces', 'spaces of domination', that are created and recreated by social relations. Take, for example, an underground train at 6 o'clock on a weekday evening, full of professional men in suits and briefcases. Without anyone saying anything to me, I feel intimidated as a slight, slightly scruffy, student with a rucksack. I feel as if I am not entitled to be there, sitting on that seat. It is not my place/space. A few hours later, on the same train, when the carriage is full of merry youngsters on their way home from a night out, it is the man in the suit whose turn it is to feel uncomfortable. Here, one physical place, the train carriage, is inhabited at different times by two very different social spaces, created by and creating the social relations unfolding.

Thus I have identified two interrelated concepts with which to use in this study of identity and exclusion. Firstly, that of place onto which the meaning of groups is inscribed, challenged and negotiated. In the same way, 'social space' is constantly produced within these places, through networks of social relations arising from human interaction within and with those places. Thus, following Keith and Pile (1993b:36), we can see "... space is more than the outcome of social relations and more than one of the dimensions through which the social is constructed. It is an active, constitutive, irreducible, necessary component in the social's composition".

## Summary

The issues requiring exploration concerning the social exclusion or integration of British-Asian youth are three-fold. Firstly, there is a confusion of stereotypical representations of British-Asian youth that has been linked to problems of social integration. Secondly, and even more importantly, there remains some inadequacy in the conceptual apparatus and methodological techniques that are used to talk about and re-present the different ethnicities and identities that exist within the artificial category 'British-Asian'. Many of these are identities that are currently rendered invisible through general stereotyping. Furthermore the linkages between British Asians and other social groups have been unexplored.

'Place' and 'space' are important to the study of exclusion and identity formation. The imperative, however, is to move away from concepts of place and space that ground identity in particular locations; global, nation, region or local (how do we delineate the boundaries of these places anyway?). Employing the concept of space as a focus of interaction for social relations, differing at different scales and contexts, the construction of identity must be set firmly within the multitude of 'social spaces' that the individual interacts with and within. Since identity refers to the politics of interaction with others, identity must be analysed within the social contexts in which interaction takes place.

Finally, the issue of integration/exclusion has been referred to with studies of minority ethnic groups often focusing on the exclusion of these groups from the rest of society (e.g. Ballard 1997), yet integration as a complex concept based on on-going interaction rather than cultural traditions, has not been well explored. Thus there is a distinction between the 'social problem' of the (actual or perceived) marginalisation of British-Asian youth, and what may be

termed the 'sociological problem' of ambiguity surrounding the notion of integration and the limitations of contemporary conceptualisations and classifications of identities and ethnicity. These two deficiencies in understanding the creation of ethnic identities, have as yet neither been investigated nor separated from each other (Allen and Macey 1994). It is this that the study aims to do; separate and explore exclusion as both a 'social', and 'sociological' problem.

## **Chapter three**

### **Methodological issues**

#### **Introduction**

The way in which methodology chapters are often written, or the way in which discussion on methodology sometimes takes place in the social sciences, points to belief that there is a difference between methodological techniques, methodological processes and epistemologies (Burgess 1986). In order to avoid this artificial trisection of thought and action, this chapter will consider the debates around the positionality of the researcher and the collection and interpretation of data in the first section, as part of the same complex research process. In the last section, taking into account these issues of reflexivity, and issues raised in the first two chapters, the techniques that were employed in the field and in writing the thesis will be presented.

#### **Reflexivity in the social sciences: an overview**

Human geography has been stirred recently by several internal crises that have changed the way in which the subject has been viewed, the research topics of interest within the discipline, and the means of carrying out and interpreting research (White and Jackson 1995). Following the 'cultural turn', culturalism has become the dish of the day in all the humanistic disciplines (Auge' 1998). If 'culture' itself is not the focus of study, it is nevertheless not off the menu, with much academic work of all disciplines being served *a la culturalism*, which includes a liberal sprinkling of postmodern analysis, spiced with feminist methodology. Although the techniques that are employed in culturally inspired analysis may vary widely, the epistemological foundations of postmodernism, for example the challenging of grand narratives and meta-theory, the existence of multiple readings and

a re-centring of the 'other', have filtered down and are generally, if reluctantly, acknowledged within much of the social sciences literature. Within the 'social theory' debates that have been re-ignited by the postmodern condition, there are two main issues that have particular relevance to this study; reflexivity (and the politics of researcher positionality) and, linked into this, questions of the representation of the research and the interpretation of textual data.

Postmodernism and its epistemological precursors such as ethnomethodology, interpretive anthropology and critical theory have been instrumental in the present reflexivity of the social sciences. Although issues of interpretation and subjectivity have long been raised in relation to social enquiry, it has been suggested that many practitioners have preferred to ignore the often disconcerting questions that have been raised (e.g. Cheater 1987). One of the main propositions of postmodern thought, that a single objective reality does not exist, has been especially hard hitting to those social scientists that have a commitment to positivist methods. At the same time, the crisis of representation in the social sciences has meant that the epistemological foundations of anthropology, and social science disciplines that use anthropological or ethnographic methods, have seen much recent turmoil. There has been a shift from questions of how best to describe social reality to questions of the interpretation of social realities (Marcus and Fischer 1986). As Geertz (1988) notes, within the social sciences, certain assumptions exist about the methods, subjects and texts produced, that when questioned have been less foundationally secure than was implied. The issues raised by such questioning have had further implications for social science inquiries, and have led to the questioning of further assumptions. The first of these is that of 'ethnographic ventriloquism'; the notion that the researcher does not just speak about a people, but *from within* the people, from their point of view. It was assumed that the researcher was able to penetrate the perspectives of subjects and represent them accurately. The second assumption, which is relevant to an increasing number of modern texts, is that the researcher can minimise the effect their own subjectivity has on their research. This is



commonly done through presenting themselves for "...authorial self-inspection for bias or subjectivity", hoping to help the reader to exclude the author so that the subjects may "...then be seen face to face" (Geertz 1988:145).

The two major issues of (1) representation - the research is done by whom, about whom, for whom?, and (2) self-reflexivity - the effect of the researcher's positionality on the research - have attracted increasing debate as personal narratives and life-histories are again gaining currency in the social sciences (Reed-Danahay 1997). In the rest of this section, I will explore the implications of these issues for this study and try to incorporate into the study the suggestion commentators have made about the need for greater reflexivity.

### **The politics of researcher positionality**

Feminist theorists have been the main proponents of recent calls for reflexivity in the social sciences (see e.g. Rose 1997, Harraway 1988). This has involved a strategic deconstruction of 'facts' that were previously taken as given and unproblematic, to reveal the very complex nature of social relations, research, and social categories that were previously accepted without question.

The social sciences have been instrumental in revealing the problematic nature of objectivity in the natural sciences, and there is a vast body of research in the sociology of science and a questioning of the scientific method of inquiry and the assumption that this is based upon (e.g. Demeritt 1996 is a recent example from within Geography). However, it has been suggested that there is still a certain lack of critical reflexivity in the social sciences, or at least that reflexivity has not been taken as seriously as it has in relation to the natural sciences (Marcus and Fischer 1987). Certain sections of the social scientific community, for example naturalists, still believe that by methodological rigour it is possible to practice an objective distance from the subjective social world we are studying (Gubrium and Holstein 1997). The importance of the position of the researcher in relation to her/his

research, other than as "morally charged reminders" of each others' gender, class, etc., and as claims to a rather hazy notion of 'authenticity', has only just been widely acknowledged (Western 1996:235). Some recognise that this is an important issue to address. For Said (1979:11), for example: "No production of Knowledge in the human sciences can ever ignore or disclaim its author's involvement as a human subject in his own circumstances...". Others have similarly been suggesting that "...we need to explore our 'somewhere else' - those other spaces (emotional, sensual, political...) that are at times excluded from our academic work" (Spivak 1996:401). The personal is indeed political, and there is great importance in scrutinising the reasons for engaging in particular projects. The position the researcher occupies, not just specifically in relation to the research, but in society in general, may be reflected in research. The self-awareness that is being called for is different to the tokenism and apologetic self-consciousness that has been the hallmark of much past reflexivity (e.g. see Knowles 1996). From a past refusal to acknowledge the almost imperial relationship between researcher and researched, academics now often condemn certain 'ethnicities', sexualities and genders as somehow placing them beyond the realm of understanding of those that occupy spaces different from their own (Kazi 1986, Bhavnani 1993). Ironically, this exclusion has come about from a postmodern shift on identities. Yet it is contradictory in the manner in which it 'boxes' those with, for example, the same sexuality, while one of the main postmodern projects has been to destroy these very same boxes.

The use of self-reflexivity by ethnographers falls fundamentally into two camps (Krieger 1996). The first, that of an 'enunciative position', such as that mentioned above, is somewhat contradictory and has been suggested to be little more than a token gesture in keeping with the current vogue. This type of position tries to declare for the reader the author's position, but these are usually just specifications about the author, such as where s/he grew up, how old s/he is, etc.. These are not useful in telling the reader much about the author's subjectivity. To declare your position, to state for the reader's ease of reference that

you are such and such, falls into the same trap of conceptualising physical or social conditions as determinants of subjectivities. Furthermore, it fixes subjectivities, and essentialises identities. The analytical benefits of presenting information on the social class, university attended, etc., of the researcher, has about as much value as a clue to their subjectivity as does a declaration of her/his height, hair colour and favourite pizza delivery company.

Important as reflexivity is, one must avoid getting drawn into this type of deterministic categorisation. It is not enough just to state at the beginning of a research paper: 'I'm black, I'm a feminist, I grew up in Lewisham', for example, because this type of information does not tell the reader about your perspectives of life, about how and why you chose the research topic, and how this could influence the data. However, the reader may use the information you have provided, and apply her/his own knowledge to these categories (which may be based on popular or academic stereotypes), to fill in the blanks. This type of enunciative reflexivity does not achieve what it sets out to do and may be harmful to the way in which the text is read.

The other position within reflexivity debates comes from those who recognise that the writer is intimately tied up in what s/he is writing, that research is a highly interactional process, where what is written falls into a "fiction/social science ambiguity" (Krieger 1996:178).<sup>1</sup> As with those students training to be clinical psychologists, who must undergo a course of therapy/counselling to ensure that, when they are practising, they understand how their judgement may be affected by life experiences or beliefs they are unaware of, the researcher should be asked to confront the reasons why, and issues around, data interpretation. The researcher should consider that her/his own subjectivity has a bearing on the interpretation, understanding and representation of social data. If we are to study

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<sup>1</sup> 'Fiction' in the sense of the postmodern idea of constructed realities.



something like identity, and we put forward that identities are formed and reformed by social interaction and interpretation, then it would be a great omission to ignore the prospect that the researcher her/him self will be equally guided by processes of identification. Bourdieu (1990:1) is amongst those who have asserted that researchers must realise that 'social reality' is an object of perceptions, including their own, which are developed within specific constraints, and that in order to progress our knowledge we must also "...progress our knowledge of the conditions of knowledge."

Linked to a reluctance to acknowledge our subjective selves, there has been a tendency amongst some social scientists to believe that there is space between ourselves and our field or/and even our *fieldwork*. Yet there are geographers and other social scientists who suggest the need to displace the meaning of the 'field' which makes a division between a researcher's life and a field of research (e.g. Lavie and Swedenburg 1996). Without delving too far into the more fabulous aspects of feminist critique of ethnographic 'fieldwork', the field, they argue, is seen by many researchers as something that needs to be 'mastered' in the masculinism of fieldwork, similar to the mastering of feminine nature by masculine science. The 'field' is also a spatial metaphor and is seen as a 'feminised field', separate from the reality of the researcher until he goes out to uncover it (Clifford 1988). Even then it is still 'othered', written out as 'outside', a cut-off reality happening to someone else (Rose 1993).

By contrast with this view, for researchers like Hastrup (1996:16), the ethnographer is part of the field, and is a part of the locus of the action that she is studying, thereby "...eliminat[ing] both subjectivism and objectivism and posit[ing] truth as an inter-subjective creation". The recognition that social realities are constructed through interpersonal relations (Berger and Luckman 1966), does not mean that the reality constructed by the researcher and her/his informants is any less real for the researcher having been part of it. Yet some believe that the reality that is constructed between

researcher and researched is not representative of other social spaces in which the researched play a role. This is because dialogue is commonly initiated by the researcher and in most cases, regardless of how close s/he gets to informants s/he obtains knowledge through unsolicited questions and a constant degree of pressure, so the results are claimed to be somehow inauthentic (Clifford 1988).

### **Problems of representation**

Another related problem has been exposed in the debate on reflexivity which cuts much deeper and which, at this time, remains unresolved. This problem centres around representation, and the suggestion that the author presents only her/his reality of the researched. This has some serious implications for theory, anti-theory and even knowledge. If we are to accept the assertion that each person views and creates her/his own reality, then even situated knowledge, let alone general theory, is redundant, except at the level of the individual. Issues of representation are apparent everywhere in the social sciences arena, but have dominantly presented themselves in a particular form; that of claims to knowledge and knowledge production.

An academic and I were casually discussing my thesis. He exclaimed that I was fortunate, because as an 'Asian female', no one would stand up and counter my research claims. What he was trying to say was that because I was brown (or Asian; depending on how you would define 'Asian'), I would be seen as holding authority on 'brown' (or Asian) matters, and that, because a good proportion of academics are white, male, middle-aged and middle-class, they would feel a certain reluctance in arguing against 'indigenous', gendered knowledge. This crisis of authority or representation in the social sciences has been analysed at two levels, the first, at a meta-level, is based on the notion of relativism, and truth claims about our experience-mediated world. The other level asks specifically who may conduct what research; who has authority to research/speak on which issues.

The 'nativist' turn, which is hotly debated, especially in American anthropology, has asserted the dictum that only a 'native' can study a 'native', that only 'ethnics' can study other 'ethnics', that only those who have experienced racism can study issues of racism. Many have focused on whether 'white' people are able to sufficiently understand 'black' issues, so as to be able to research them (see Winchester 1990, Douglas 1992, Sulesi 1992, Anthias 1998). Other questions have included whether shared experiences of gender, or given that in many cases researchers are white middle-class males, the general experience of living in Britain or of being from a certain region, out-weigh the differences of ethnicity and class. In Douglas's (1992) view, colour, ethnicity and experiences of racism are paramount. If white women do not understand racism, then they cannot understand enough about what it means to be able to research this issue. Douglas goes so far as to say that white women are implicitly racist, that they do not understand black women's cultural traditions, except from their own ethnocentric viewpoint, often because they have already been manipulated by the popular media and academic and mainstream culture. An example of this might be the popular western conception of Muslim women as oppressed. Douglas also says that there is a difference in relationship black women and white women have with work and the family, which simply being a women cannot outweigh. In effect what Douglas is arguing is that experience leads to truth. As Bondi (1993:95) points out, the assumption in this type of thinking is that experience results in authentic, incontestable knowledge:

This implies that rather than being constructed, experience has the quality of an irreducible essence, which resides in such characteristics as female-ness, middle class-ness, white-ness and so on. It also invokes a kind of personal immunity, in that to authenticate knowledge in terms of personal experience is to make one's ideas and one's being indistinguishable. Consequently, anyone who criticises knowledge generated in this way is liable to be accused of attacking the person from whom it originated.

Often called 'the claim to truth', the conflation of experience with 'truth' is sometimes used to silence other claims to knowledge by claiming authenticity (Bowes 1996, Bhavnani

1993). Bondi (1993) suggests that experience, rather than being seen as authenticity, should be seen in its ability to inform us in a particular way. For Reed-Danahay (1997:4) also research carried out by an 'insider' is not necessarily more 'authentic' than that done by an outsider. Conditioning this view somewhat, while Ahmed and Shore (1995:30) refrain from passing comment on whether 'outsiders' may study other cultures or not, they do hold that a greater depth of study can be carried out by those who are part of the cultures they study:

Detailed personal knowledge and a wider socio-cultural perspective on the societies they study does give anthropologists a particularly useful lens onto the problems facing a specific group, though it is perhaps the secondary insights and elaboration that can be made from this that matter more than the raw data.

Others also believe that however skilful and perceptive an 'outsider' is, s/he will not be able to "...approach the intimacy available to some insiders" (e.g. Hann 1987:144). Burgess (1986:52), for example, suggests that the "...age, gender and ethnicity both of the researcher and the researched will in part determine the kind of research that can be done, the social situations that can be studied and the data that can be collected". As I will describe later, the way in which the participants perceived me in this research certainly had an impact on whether I could access social situations. According to some, (e.g. Hayano 1979 in Reed-Danahay 1997) it is possible to go from being an 'outsider' to an 'insider', even if you do not start off in the same social group as you are studying. This can be achieved by socialisation or intimate familiarity with the group, such that the group accord her/him 'membership'. Indeed, as not all 'members' of a culture will be either committed or accepted, or even conversant with its value system and codes of behaviour, and in the same vein, it may be possible for a researcher to enter into and try to understand the culture without acceptance from its 'members'.

The debate over who can perform what research points to a worrying epistemological problem, which has been largely un-discussed in the literature on reflexivity. The issue is where the boundaries of a cultural system or cultural experience end

and where another begins, and how we may define who is a native or who 'belongs' (for an exception see McDonald 1989). In a practical sense we may ask whether, I, for example, of Pakistani and Indian parents, born in Pakistan but living in Britain, would be a 'native' of British cultures(s) or Pakistani culture(s) or Indian culture(s), or all, or none. A person does not belong to only one cultural group. There are many aspects of cultural identity to consider. Should we consider someone who is not gay as able to study a gay culture, and if not, could we then consider a homosexual as able to study an aspect of heterosexual culture. Furthermore, as will be argued later in this thesis, not all members of a 'cultural group' actually share the same experiences and not all will accept or understand or adhere to common cultural codes. By lumping together those that we arbitrarily judge as belonging to a particular culture (and thereby excluding others), we are essentialising on the basis of characteristics like 'ethnic origin', 'class', territory, sexual preference and so on. We ignore that there are a wide range of cultural systems and subjectivities that these classed, ethnicised, etc., individuals may belong to, plus a multiplicity of ways in which they will identify with others. The question is really about where and how we may draw lines between acceptable similarities and unacceptable differences between cultural systems and in cultural understandings. If we are argue against the homogenising tendencies of categories such as 'British Asian', it would be untrue to say that because I fall into this category I will immediately have a rapport with the participants of the study, or that I will be able to tell their stories from a 'nativist' view point. It would likewise be incorrect to hold that we share any kind of similarity beyond the fact that our ancestors were from the Indian Subcontinent.

Further difficulties arise when we address the issue of the 'viewpoint' of the data, that is how reality is seen from the different perspective of each actor. Referring to writing techniques employed by novelists, Gerharty (1995:56) asks us to imagine a jetliner carrying 350 people that has developed engine trouble and eventually crashes. She points out that the way in which the events occur, their relevance and importance will be different for each of

those 350 people. The passengers in economy class will have a very different experience and understanding of the crash to that of the pilot in the cockpit, and certainly there will also be vast differences within them, although all are equally real. The analogy can be applied to research on social phenomenon; a particular viewpoint first has to be selected. In terms of the notion of integration, in this study I examine the viewpoint of the everyday lives of young British Asians in London. The story would be very different if I were to examine integration from the perspective of social policy formulation. In order to be able to tell the story of passengers in economy class, or from the viewpoint of mainstream British culture, or from that of first generation Asian immigrants, at the very least we have to be there ourselves. This is where we may pay heed to the arguments regarding 'natives' studying 'natives'. Yet, as Strathern (1987) points out, even if we are there ourselves, even if we have an intimate familiarity with the culture that we are studying, there is no guarantee that the research will be written from a 'nativist' point of view, as compared with an 'anthropological' point of view. Writing about nativist research Strathern (1987:16) posits that:

Indigenous reflection is incorporated as part of the data to be explained, and cannot itself be taken as the framing of it, so that there is always a discontinuity between indigenous understandings and the analytical concepts which frame the ethnography itself. These derive from a specific theoretical focus that may make intelligible the anthropologist's behaviour (as an 'academic') but not necessarily what he/she writes.

Adding to this point, Reed-Danahay (1997:4) suggests that the 'insider' faces the onerous task of "rewriting the self and the social" by transcending "everyday conceptions of selfhood and social life". The insider writing ethnography in effect becomes an outsider merely by the process of researching. Researchers have to detach themselves from themselves enough to be able to articulate the social.

These points echo Hastrup's (1996:57) argument, which posits a difference between cultural knowledge, or being part of a culture, and anthropological knowledge. She argues

that "...knowing a culture does not imply that one knows how a culture is actually premised and constituted. This is anthropological knowledge". Just belonging to a culture or knowing its rules and codes does not necessarily mean that you understand the culture and how it works. Her point is that, for natives, their own culture "... is not 'seen' but 'seen with' ". There is no denying this may be true, that social investigators through training may be better at unravelling the threads that constitute the web that is culture, but whether this is really valuable cultural knowledge or not is debatable. A culture may operate as a rational and irrational entity but the members are often part of the culture without understanding or accepting the way in which it functions; for a native, it may just be the way it is. However, the suggestion that there is an irreconcilable, intrinsic difference between native ways of seeing and anthropological (even 'nativist' anthropological) ways of seeing and representation may be logically persuasive, but it implies a homogenous 'nativist' point of view that the researcher cannot fully be a part of. This is based on an essentialised, deterministic notion of identities. Other commentators have pointed out that even when researching, there are a range of different viewpoints that a researcher will automatically switch between, owing to the range of different social positions and identifications an individual holds (e.g. Ellis 1991). As one illustration, Ronai (1992:104) wrote of her fieldwork as an erotic dancer;

I cannot smoothly switch hats and write " here is how the dancer in me feels, and here is how the researcher feels and here is how the wife feels, and so on", it is dishonest and contrived to sort out separate influences and label them... My conception of 'myself' incorporates influences from these roles, but the end result is not compartmentalised around them.

In the same way Ronai finds that while carrying out her research it is difficult and artificial to document her feelings according to her three main identities - that of wife, dancer and researcher - individuals do not sort and label their identifications as mother, Muslim, Pakistani, and so on. The feelings emanating from one identification mix indivisibly with those from other identifications. It is then difficult to argue that there is an authentic 'nativist' point of view that is untainted by other identifications. A nativist point of view

incorporates other variable points of view, from positions such as gender and sexuality, and also that of a researcher. Academia lends the native the conceptual tools and the language for analysing and documenting experiences, but this process may also effect the experiences of the native. The same could be said of the 'native' accountant or the 'religiously faithful' native; their experiences too will be affected by their particular ideologies, occupations, ways of seeing the world and so on. There is nothing unnatural or inauthentic about a nativist researcher, anymore that there is about a native supermarket worker.

However, the term 'native' itself is unnatural. Although most early anthropologists claimed to speak from the natives' point of view, this is not true of contemporary studies of an anthropological nature, which have realised myriad difficulties in trying to maintain a 'native' point of view. Postmodernism has especially encouraged the idea that in seeking sociological knowledge, all view points are equally real and valid, and as anthropologists (e.g. Geertz 1988) have pointed out, "anthropological interpretation cannot and should not be imprisoned within the mental horizons of others (whoever they are)" (Hastrup 1996:153).

### **The rise of autoethnography**

As some social scientists grapple with the problems of representation, while others, for epistemological, political and financial reasons, have come to realise that 'culture' encompasses far more than the exoticised world of tribal people and remote lands, 'home' cultures are increasingly being turned to as study sites (Auge 1998). At the same time, within modern ethnography, self-awareness has become obligatory, with many researchers taking to autoethnography (e.g. Okely 1992, Fiske 1990). Autoethnographies are usually personalised accounts of an ethnographic nature. This may involve work carried out on a group that is traditionally a focus of ethnographic study, but by a member of that group, or it may include ethnographic work with a strong autobiographical narrative (Routledge 1996, Reed-Danahay 1997, also Valentine 1998,).



Indeed, some anthropologists have argued that a diary concerned with details of the researcher's feelings, as well as research notes, should be regarded as essential to fieldwork methodology (e.g. Okely 1996). Ethnographers in the past have frequently kept diaries, for example Malinowski's later published diaries of his famous study of the Trobriand Islanders (Malinowski 1968), but only recently has this kind of research reflexivity re-entered the social science vogue as an explicit recognition of the role of the author in the construction of the reality that s/he is describing. (for a commentary, see Burgess 1984)

In terms of both the study of self and the study of one's own social or cultural groups, autoethnographies have been frowned upon by some members of the academy, for three main reasons. Firstly, the insider status, or the closeness of the researcher to the subject, although it may yield more intimate data, has been accused of preventing the researcher from standing far enough back to see what is really happening. It is suggested that the researcher studying her/his own social groups may be too enmeshed in their social relations to 'get out of them' and view them with a critical eye (Lofgren 1987). The ideology of the researcher may be similar to that of the group s/he is studying, making criticism more difficult, and further, it has been said that the native ethnographer is far more likely to rely on preconceived notions about their own culture (Hastrup 1996). In a practical sense too, it has been suggested that while the fieldwork is carried out, the researcher may be restricted in what information or groups s/he has access to, because of the social position s/he occupies within the group. This, however, could apply to any ethnography. Access may be just as problematic, in a different way, for those who are studying 'other groups'. In the main, the criticisms levied at autoethnography are those regarding the transformation of 'cultural knowledge' into 'anthropological knowledge'. However, these problems are just as relevant to 'outsider' ethnographers. The only difference is that the outsider's 'cultural knowledge' or preconceived notions of a culture being studied are often based on stereotypical, popular, normalised images emanating from their 'own' culture' which they have to overcome.

The continuing commitment of many strands of the social sciences to quasi-scientific techniques of collection and analysis are another reason why autoethnographies are not valued as social data (Richardson 1992). An autoethnography explicitly acknowledges the subjective and emotional nature of the social data being collected and the effect the researcher has on the social context and the analysis of the data, which necessarily deny the need to conform with some conceptions of validity, truth and applicability (Denzin 1996, see also Harding 1991 for a commentary). In this respect, personal stories are not generally seen as a valued source of research data. Denzin (1992:246) shows that there exists in anthropology a 'hierarchy of voices', which grant certain sources of data more value or authenticity (or less subjectivity) than others. This means that anthropologists have often had to rely on other sources of information, archival documents, academic papers etc., or to put it another way; they have had to appeal to the interpretive community in order to back up their narrative work (Baxter and Eyles 1997). Denzin (1996) believes that intimate, first hand knowledge of a particular social group by the narrator provides sufficient authority to eliminate the need for references to additional sources of information. In practice, the ability of the author to persuade readers of the efficacy of the work has depended not on the convincing content, but on whether the work makes sense in terms of linking it and backing it to theory and to other studies. Brah (1991) also notes this reluctance, arguing that although difference is the focus of many discussions within feminist theory, in trying to describe a specific experience or a particular individual, it is essentialised and extended to others, often for the purposes of appealing to the interpretive community.

For all the advantages of autoethnographies as a form of rich research, it raises many research problems; personal, practical and epistemological, some of which are also apparent in other research methods, but maybe exaggerated in autoethnography. A strong example of this would be political dilemmas the researcher may encounter about the data collected and how best to present it when working with a group the researcher is familiar or intimate with

(Segalen and Zonabend 1987). In the case of this study, I found it difficult to be neutral in my comments and conversations with the participants, especially as I was, or became friends, with a number of the participants. I also had to decide whether to include data or interpretations that the participants may not be happy with. The researcher can face dilemmas about whether to present data that could be appropriated and used in a negative way by another social group. As Cheater (1987:165) reminds us:

...[The] construction of reality for a particular society feeds into the development process, and must therefore be regarded as a responsibility - as well as a right - of intellectual citizenship in such a system.

Taking note of the comments of the responsibility of the researcher, in this study I follow the suggestion that the project of 'native' anthropologists should be to 'write against culture', in the way that it has been generalised, maligned and stereotyped by imperialist anthropology. This involved representing the particularities and differences that have been ironed out and the people that have been lumped together (Abu-Lughod 1991). As Marcus and Fischer (1986:133) point out, an important tradition in ethnography is that of cultural critique, whereby the task is to "...discover the variety of modes of accommodation and resistance by individuals and groups to their shared social order. It is a strategy for discovering diversity in what appears to be an ever homogenous world". The choice to write autoethnography has often been made with this explicit political motive; as when the researcher wants to represent the group (of which they are a member) from an alternative, often personal or 'native' points of view, to counter 'outsider's' points of view.

Further to the difficulties that I have already outlined in deciding who is a 'native', some anthropologists have argued that writing from a nativist point of view is an impossible task. On account of the fact that s/he is researching, the researcher will never be able to articulate the native point of view as s/he would have her/himself. As Strathern (1987:23) puts it: "...the kind of author which the ethnographer becomes in her/his writings of texts is not determined by an act of will. What our representations of 'other' will mean must depend

in part on what 'their' representations mean to them." She concludes with a suggestion for a way out of this dilemma. Here she states that "...this in turn will depend on whether or not the anthropologist is indeed at home", thereby looping back the argument to the point of whether we can truly locate ourselves within the social group we are studying. Hastrup (1996) is not so optimistic. She asserts that it is never possible to represent from the native point of view, because whether you are at home or not with the group you are studying, for researchers the audience in mind is the academy (also see Cheater 1987) or sometimes the popular press. For the native, she argues, there is no need to explain, to rationalise, to theorise or to decode. When one is researching, one is a researcher, not a native: and therefore 'home' is a social science discipline. As I have already suggested, this point is misleading and based on a notion of discreet, homogenous cultures or 'home', as in that of the native, and that of the social scientist. In this study, for example, I have adopted the position of someone who has familiarity with some of the cultures and social groups to which the participants belong, and feel that these are often misrepresented. In order to counter or add to these representations with my own, I use the concepts, methods and language of social research. In doing so, the aim 'to write against culture' becomes framed by each of my 'positions' as woman, as coloured, as young, as urban, as researcher, and so on, which each partly constitute the other. It is not possible to separate my 'homes' or my identifications from each other.

With the sticky issues of representation and locating a 'home' still cropping up in autoethnography, other researchers have chosen to go one step further and to study themselves or to include themselves explicitly in their research as an informant (e.g. Rapport 1995, Riesman 1977, Weil 1987, Mascarenhas-Keyes 1987, Okely and Callaway (1992) edited collection). Stuart Hall (1992a:277) points out that "...autobiography is usually thought of as seizing the authority of authenticity, ...[but] in order not to be authoritative, I've got to speak autobiographically". With the acceptance that the researcher is intimately tied to in her/his work, many of the researchers writing this type of

autoethnography have chosen to deconstruct the choice and practice of the researcher as set in the academy, as well as using the researcher as a rich source of cultural information.

The advantages of this type of autoethnography are manifold; problems of access to information are irrelevant, as are issues of being at 'home' and developing a rapport with informants, and even more importantly the issue of cultural translation and (re)presentation too, become redundant. The inclusion of oneself in research provides an excellent source of information for exploring the processes that produce self-hood, the "...range of choices open to the agency of the self" (Herzfeld 1997:173). Rapport (1995) uses only himself as information for research on issues relating to the migrant. He notes that, not only does his research allow him to theorise about himself, but also about others:

If I am conscious of the way I live through discourses, stereotyped and other, how I switch, combine and juxtapose interpretations, identities and selves in securing a home for myself in the contemporary world, then I can construe how those around me might be doing likewise. (Rapport 1995:269)

Rapport suggests that the use of autobiographical data may be fruitful beyond its strictly personal reference, that we may be able to extrapolate our knowledge of ourselves to the actions of others. This is both a useful and a dangerous proposition. If we are to use personal data sources, we should take care that they do not inform us of the 'realities' of, but of the 'possibilities' for, the social action of others.

The epistemological battle, as outlined above, is sure to continue. If heed is paid to the vicissitudes of the ongoing debate then we are left without a definite plan of action, as all seems uncertain as the very foundations of our knowledge have been laid open for a radical reassessment. But Geertz (1988) has urged us to remember that although we may question the ways that knowledge claims are made, the methods, processes and assumptions involved, this should not mean we cannot take knowledge claims seriously. What we should understand is how and why they are produced, and that we are not really representing the

social realities we are researching, since we can only 'evoke' (Tyler 1986). While this reflection continues we should consider particular knowledges not as truth, or even *a* truth, but as contested, contextualised and conjunctured knowledge, created through, and constituted by, particular identifications.

## **Methodology**

### **Aims and considerations**

In acknowledgement of the suggestions that the researcher is a positioned subject, I wish my position in relation to the fieldwork to be made clear to the reader. As I and others have already suggested, it is not enough to say that I am British Asian, female and so on, as this type of information does not tell the reader anything about the positions of the author. In order to try to make my feelings and my research agenda available to the reader, I will give an account of the reasons why I chose to undertake this research, what I expected to find, and the assumptions I brought into the work. This might help to make clear the conditions that contributed to the production of knowledge, as the choice of the research topic did not arise out of an objective review of the literature, but from a personal (political) motivation. My aims of the research and the reasons for them are as such:

- (1) As a British Asian female, I found that the depiction of British Asian identities in both the popular media, 'common-sense' discourses and within academia to be based on questionable assumptions of South-Asian traditions. As I feel strongly that this narrowly defined 'British Asianess' does not apply to myself, I wanted to 'write against culture' (Abu-Lughod 1991), as in against the homogenising tendencies in thought and categorisation on 'British Asians'. The study will use the individual participants as the source of information about the 'culture'. The aim, then, is to show the range of choices and actions that exist within the research group, based on resistance, acceptance and compromise. Furthermore, I wished to examine closer the theories put forward by those

who have attempted to write 'against culture' through the use of ideas of 'hybridity' and 'third spaces'. I felt that these theories, on the whole, have not been linked to social realities and the people and situations they seek to describe. I felt that theoretically, these definitions suggesting the novelty of 'hybridized' immigrant cultures, only reinforced the view of cultures as inherently static and bounded.

- (2) Coming across references to 'integration' early on in the research, I was amazed that such notions were still being batted around in relation to 'ethnic' minorities. As such, I wished to examine the notion of 'integration' and its supposed obversity of 'exclusion', starting from the point of exploring what it can possibly mean when it is suggested that certain ethnic minorities must 'integrate' into British (or European) society. Looking at exclusion in terms of informal citizenship rules, I hoped to explore the way in which young British Asians interact with other social groups in British society. While acknowledging that ethnicity is not linked to primordial loyalties to regions or religions or language, much literature still looks back to South-Asia and specifically South-Asian cultural practices as the primary influence in the creation of young British Asians identities. In response to this, I wanted to demonstrate that 'ethnicity' for young British Asians, as in identifying with a collectivity, need not apply only to linkages with other British Asians. However, I wanted also to highlight 'ethnic' resources, such as colour, religion, regional origin, and so on, in the ways they are constructed by different groups within British society. This involved exploration of how they might be mobilised and operationalised in identity construction, both as a result, and a constitutive agent, of political interaction.
- (3) With current thought telling us that 'geography matters', that place contextualises the construction of 'race' and 'nationhood' and generates specific ideologies and identities, I wished to try to highlight the contextual nature of identity construction of British Asian youth. In doing so, I wanted to move beyond work that simplifies the impact local areas have on identity construction by examining 'residential' place as just one of many different 'social spaces', or the spaces of different social relations, that the individual

enters into and engages with, even for short periods of time, in the course of everyday life.

Noting suggestions that the experience and relations of space have scalar distinctions, this study explores the interaction of the individual in different 'scales' of spaces: the self, the family, peer groups, university/college/school, communities of locality, ethnic community etc., to see whether there is a specific relationship between place scales, or whether they are merely different in the complexity of social relations they present. Each of the social spaces studied is important because it is part of the constitution of social relations. These spaces can be conceived as sites of social contestation and formation, where information is received and reflected, partially constituted by and for the self, but also through interactions with and for the reception of, other social groups.

By outlining the aims that developed through the research process, I hope to have made clearer how my research agenda may be implicated in the ethnography. However, what the outline of aims has not done, is given the reader a clue to my subjectivity beyond these research aims. In acknowledgement of the need to present the author's subjectivity within the study, and with an acceptance of the large body of work arguing that researchers all too often make an artificial distinction between fieldwork and the rest of their lives, I follow a somewhat unconventional approach. The ethnographic data presented will include that 'collected' over a diverse time scale, rather than just the 'standard' year of 'fieldwork'. Moreover, I wish to make the presence of the researcher/author explicit in the research by including myself as a participant. Blumer (1986) notes that even though the purpose of much research is to decode and re-articulate the social reality of participants, the manner in which this will be done, the processes by which the information is gathered, accounted and theorised depends on the analyst's subjectivities and politics. Bringing reflexivity into ethnography, especially into a study of this type, means that the ethnographer must also be seen as a participant. Since reflexivity entails acknowledging the position and role of the



researcher in the fieldwork, this must include the assumptions and experience which have led to the choice of subject and the way in which it will be written up. By including myself as a participant, the reader might be better able to see how each of those socially constructed ideas of who I may be and hence, how I see others, are intricately related to my experiences of social life. If trying to obtain objectivity is a fruitless mission and we accept that the researcher always affects that which s/he researches, it is beneficial to explicitly include myself as a participant in order to show how my own experiences affect not just the way in which data are interpreted but also how I may affect the articulation and the writing up of the position and experiences of the other participants. As Brettell (1997) points out, it is important to portray the interactional relationship of ethnographic research, and to reveal the researcher's own relationships with subjects, and the subject.

Furthermore, as a young British Asian female, I am a useful source of information, because I am intimately familiar with my background and past experiences. When using personal data sources, the problems of access to participants, of familiarisation and the problem of distortion and misinterpretation of the meanings of the actions and words of participants by the researcher are eliminated. In including myself as a participant I have noted potential problems of personal evidence, such that the researcher may face in being able to 'see themselves from the outside'. In this case the personal information presented should be seen as that of a personal viewpoint, rather than a critical deconstructive viewpoint (if this is possible anyway). One of the other problems which have been highlighted with personal data sources is of particular relevance to this study. Because I had chosen to study a social group in which I would at least partially place myself, or one with which I am to some degree familiar with, I had to be careful to realise that I may have been acting in accordance to the rules of that community. This could affect the way the research was conducted, the type and meaning of interactions, and their interpretation. Describing her own realisation of this while studying her women's community, Kreiger (1996:187) writes "...even in those special-purpose sessions [interview sessions], I was engaged with

the community and acting according to its rules, just as I had outside the sessions. The interview situations were, in effect, small dramatic re-enactments of the social dynamics of the larger community." This could be a draw back in that the researcher is bound by the cultural codes of the community that s/he is studying. However, for a researcher able to see this, it is beneficial in helping to restate the rules and codes of the wider community within just an interview situation.

The criticism of 'subjectiveness', which I outlined earlier, I feel is not particular to personal data sources or familiarity with a group, but is applicable to all participants, and to all situations of researcher-participant interaction. For Hastrup (1996) it is possible for the ethnographer in the field to temporarily become 'another person', to change or suspend her/his identity in order to handle different epistemologies. This can be just as true for the researcher who has to examine her/his own personal information. Moreover, even without using myself as an participant, the study is an autoethnography. I am looking at cultures, some of which I partially place myself within, and, if it is permissible' for the native anthropologist to study and represent his own culture regardless of potential problems of closeness to participants and problems of representation, then it is a contradiction that researchers may not use themselves as representatives of their own 'cultured' point of view. I see this study as being framed by a finite range of viewpoints which include that of 'native' and of 'ethnographer'. Within this framing, there are certain topics that are covered more extensively than others and topics that have been left out altogether (for example issues of alternative sexualities are not explored extensively). This is because I am picking and thinking about the topics as a 'subject' and exploring and writing as an ethnographer, although these are mutually constitutive. My meaning here is that the choice of research project, the topics covered, and the interpretation of the data, have all been affected by my subjectivity.

In order to allow the reader to read this subjectivity, the presence of myself in the data is intentionally explicit, both through my empathy with certain others but also with the presentation of personal data, particularly if a point made through another participant coincided with my own experiences. I have documented my own experiences/perspectives, because the reader should be aware that this might reflect my empathy with them. It is important for the reader to create a picture from the white bits left on the canvass I will paint. As Thrift (1996:31) points out, absences are just as important as presences, that "...practices involve observing from situations as much as they involve being present within them". The silences and the quiet voices within the study may be just as important as those that shout out. This point applies with force because of the wide range of participants, from a variety of different socio-economic backgrounds, ideologies, ages and so on, within the study. Some of these have experiences that may be far closer to my own and therefore may be represented more accurately than others (irrespective of efforts to take this possibility into account). This issue relates back to that of selecting a viewpoint. Although I am trying to represent the young people who participated in the study accurately, regrettably but honestly, my feeling is that I am, as is every other researcher, writing a form of autoethnography, because I am writing about other people's experiences through the experience and understanding of my own.

### **Data collection techniques**

Social science methods are no longer seen as merely the objective means of collecting data. Methods of data collection and interpretation have strong implications for the perspective the results take, and the choice of method rests largely on the beliefs of the researcher on the nature of the social phenomenon studied. There is a growing awareness that the reality is constructed rather than just discovered through the research procedure (Gubrium and Holstein 1997). The researcher cannot get away from her/his subjectivity, experiences, and presuppositions. These are what guide the choice of the methodological technique and then the way in which the collected data are interpreted. The process is interlinked at all levels.

When exploring issues like that of identity, there are a variety of ways in which the topic has been analysed and the data has been represented. But what is for certain is that the data set cannot be collected nor represented in a purely quantitative manner.

When examining issues of identity, we are not dealing with inanimate objects, but with people, language and culture. These include processes, interactions, inter-subjectivity and human emotions. This means that identity, which has been suggested to be relational, as well as constructed through, and constructing, social interaction, cannot be reduced down to "he calls himself English" or "she calls herself Asian" in the context of an interview situation or a questionnaire. As Grills (1998a) notes, this type of method of data collection cannot interpret or represent participants' everyday lives and actions. Writing of questionnaires, he suggests that "... such strategies keep the sociologist at arms length from the people on who he or she is purporting to comment" (Grills 1998a:3). Owing to its very complexity, identity must be examined within its social context; as Wicker (1997a:23) suggests, it is not possible to "... analyse identity, strategy and the construction of meaning separately. An understanding of identity is not determined by answers to one question, nor from one respondent. Instead, we must ask questions such as; 'why does she feel she is British', 'why *doesn't* she feel she is Pakistani', 'do the rest of British people see her as British', 'are there accepted rules of membership', and so on. In taking into account that social acts and social relations are intertwined, the cultural settings and resources, as well as context of interaction/action, become paramount in the analysis of *becoming* rather than being (Bruner 1996, Gutting 1996). Furthermore, the meanings behind language and behind action are not always determinable from data collection techniques like questionnaires, structured interviews and statistical analysis. As Blumer (1986) points out, quantitative methods such as survey data and structured questionnaires maybe suitable for studying physical entities, but in order to understand the meanings behind the actions of everyday life, we must be there ourselves.

A problem with quantitative, and even some forms of qualitative data analysis, is the assumption there is some sort of a common structure to people's actions and thoughts. That by watching actions, or listening to words, a social scientist can determine the meanings behind actions. These methods might allow us to see the 'surface public self', but this is inclined to be very different from the emotional experiences of a person (Ellis and Flaherty 1992). Wittgenstein (1980) has been the main proponent in encouraging social scientists to see the world in a different way. He argues that the way in which people make the world intelligible to themselves is through common public practices. Rather than there being agreement of opinions, there is a common understanding of everyday practices. There is common agreement on what is false and what is true. This is agreed through the language people use. It is rooted in social relations around which the language is formed. The problem of misrecognition is not therefore explicitly around the meanings attached to words but around the social practices that the words describe and relate to.

In order to understand speech, proposes Wittgenstein, language cannot be separated from the 'behavioural order' of which it is just one part. Verbal and non-verbal communication together are needed to gain a proper understanding of an individual's thoughts. If words, noises and remarks were studied on their own, it would be almost impossible to know what was being said. In the context of conversation, the participants, and the topic are just a part of the larger 'pattern of action'. Thus, for Hopkins (1995:47) as part of a society where meaning is implicitly linked to words:

... we tie the complex structure of utterance to particular points in the framework of action and context, and therefore interpret the rest of behaviour as informed by thought which, which like that expressed in language, has fully articulate content.

Kuhn also recognised the problems of interpretation of meanings of action and language. He argued that it is possible not only for people to see the same situation, yet describe it using different words, but perhaps even more confusingly, have a different perception of a situation, yet use the same words to describe it (referred to in Favretti, Sandri, and Scazzieri,

1999). If this is the case, then any type of social enquiry that seeks to articulate a social reality, let alone ethnography, must choose carefully techniques of collecting and interpreting data.

As such, participant observation has been strongly favoured by ethnographers because of the way it allows the distance between researcher and the researched to be closed. This enables the meanings of action to be understood over time by the immersion of the researcher in the group being researched. While some commentators on participant observation purport that there are varying degrees that a researcher may adopt in participant observation - total observer, observer as participant, participant as observer and total participant - really the researcher will be all of these at different times (Evans 1986, Burgess 1986). This study is slightly peculiar in that I am, at the same time, the researcher and part of the researched, observer and observed. However, there are different types of my participation within the study because, as I have already suggested, the category 'British Asian' is too diverse for me to be equally close in subjectivity with all the participants in the study. But I as I was always present, creating a particular social reality through my interaction with the other participants, my role as participant in this study is, as is every other researcher in their own work, explicit.

Taking note of the debated advantages and disadvantages of particular methodological techniques, this study was carried out using a flexible 'ethnographic' methodology. Contrary to researchers who have studied the issue of identity through questionnaires and interviews, in the belief that identity is a relational construct and hence cannot be detached from the contexts in which it is created, this study used primarily participant observation, with some unstructured interviews with the parents of the young people investigated.

An initial pilot study was undertaken at a youth club in a London inner city that had a large population of British Bangalis. I took up the position of a voluntary youth-worker, working two to three evenings a week. The pilot study allowed me to gain a greater understanding of the issues to be studied, and helped to pinpoint the factors that warranted further investigation (see Burgess 1984, Hollis 1995). I was made aware early in the pilot project of potential problems that were likely to be encountered, especially in gaining access to participants' social spaces.

## Who

The necessity to study identity constructions within their social contexts meant that the study could only include a small number of participants. This study primarily focuses on a small number of key participants, following them through a range of different social spaces. In each space, means and patterns of interaction and identification were observed. The study inevitably includes a less in-depth focus on other members of their peer groups and others in their spaces of interaction.

Initial contacts were made from the youth club. I also attended local action groups, but eventually stuck with several participants from the youth club, as this was by far the most 'natural setting', as well as being one I could easily participate in without my position as researcher being too obvious. Other participants were picked from my own peer groups, and I used the snowball method to be introduced to further participants. The choice of individual participants depended greatly of the likelihood of access to her/his social networks and social spaces. As such, the initial participants may not be, and were not intended to be, representative of the young British-Asian population in general. What they do provide is a diverse enough contact network from which subsequent participants were chosen. While there is likely to exist a huge range of subjectivities in the British-Asian youth population, the participants here are considered to be *examples* rather than representatives of British-Asian youths. That said, they may be considered 'representative' in

that they are perfect examples or representations of their own cultural experience (see Mead and Metraux 1953).

The participants included both males and females of South-Asian origin, between the ages of 17 and 25. Special care was taken to pick a 'cross section'<sup>2</sup> of participants as far as was possible; for example by including a range of regional categories such as Punjabis, Gujeratis, Bengalis etc., and a range of class and religious backgrounds. In using differing regional backgrounds as part of the analysis, the study does not imply a belief in an essential regional identity. The potentially differing religious, linguistic and other resources that may be expressed by those from different regions can still be analysed without an over-bearing reference to regional typologies. In order to implement a comparative analysis (Glaser and Strauss 1967, Strauss and Corbin 1990), some participants were chosen to maximise potential differences in subjectivities. As a result informants came from different 'class' backgrounds. Others were selected to minimise differences so as to elucidate patterns of behaviour. Care was also taken to pick participants whose role in their peer group would allow access to or interaction with other potential participants. As such, participants did not threaten my engagement with a peer group, as might happen if an individual had a particularly powerful personality or marginal position (Hollis 1995). This inevitably meant that 'atypical' group members were likely to be discarded.

During the years of the research, any British Asian I met became a potential informant, depending on the access I would be granted to their social spaces. This non-representative line in selecting participants was beneficial in allowing relatively easy substitution of participants if access was proving difficult (see Johnson 1990).

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<sup>2</sup> a cross section includes those resources identified, during the pilot study, as of potential importance to the construction of ethnic identities.



## How

It was recognised early in the pilot project that it would not be possible to follow each participant into every social space I wished to explore. Some spaces were far more accessible than others, but with restrictions differing from participant to participant. One technique that was used to overcome the problem of access was through using participants chosen from my own peer networks, since access to family and peer groups, in most cases, was already guaranteed. For all the participants, observation of at least two or three different spaces has been possible, so comparisons could be drawn.

After a relationship was established and a participant chosen, each participant was observed in as many different social spaces as possible. The language used with different people, ideas, opinions and images expressed by participants, as well as group-actor positioning and group alliances, were noted and compared across social spaces as possible, as each social space consisted of a different set of social relations. Differences in identifications, as well as the disparity that occurs between oral responses and observed behaviour, demonstrate the contribution of social context to the construction of the young people's identities.

The social spaces examined included those of interaction with the participant's peer-group in the local area, spaces of interaction at work or at college, and with other family members such as siblings and parents, plus spaces incorporating other authoritative family and religious figures. This approach was extremely time-consuming, as well as being frequently problematic in terms of access to certain social situations. The two social spaces that presented the greatest problems of access were: (1) school/work, and (2) especially for male participants, the space of the family. In many Asian communities, male-female non-familial relations are frowned upon, and although this is less true for the younger generations, many of the males, especially younger Bangali participants recruited from the youth club, exhibited ambivalent attitudes towards me and other British Asian females in

general. Although I had familiarity with some of the lifestyles and subcultures of participants, I did feel more detached from particular participants, such as the younger Bangali males. In addition, while I was part of the groups I was researching, because they gave me membership, I had carefully follow group rules. This necessitated a careful approach to establishing friendships with male participants, ideally building them up over a long period of time.

I had to consider and evaluate several routes to gaining access to social situations. For example, one way of overcoming the problem of access to family settings for male participants would have been to work as a 'detached' youth-worker, i.e., visiting the young people and their families in their own homes. After consideration and speaking with 'detached' workers, I felt this would have been too problematic since I would hold an authoritative, almost invasive, role. An alternative was gaining access through other members of the family, such as sisters or mothers, some of whom were members of community groups I was working with, such as the Bengali Women's Action Group, and similar community contact networks. This route, however, was ultimately not used, because of the problematic nature of being 'friends' with participants' mothers and older sisters. Ultimately I had to rely on friendships in gaining access to family spaces. The decision to use participants from my own peer group was made precisely for this reason.

Other social situations proved less difficult to access. For example it was relatively easy to gain access to certain participants' work settings, since many were employed in retail services which tend to have a high turn-over rate. It was therefore possible for me to seek employment for short periods of time with relative ease. Thus, I gained employment at MacDonalds, and at a DIY superstore, in order to have access to work spaces. Another participant was recruited during my summer job I had at Debenhams department store, as I had established a friendship here. Other potential participants were still in education, more of them in further education colleges than in schools. Access and interaction with

participants in school would have been more problematic, since I would probably have had to enter school as a teacher's assistant or a similar authoritative figure, preventing interactive observation. Registering for the same B-Tech at a further education college as one of participant (originally recruited at the youth club) proved relatively easy. Here I was able to move around with the participant unrestricted, sitting in lectures or classes without drawing unwanted attention to myself. The greatest difficulty has been in gaining access to more formal working situations, such as the law firm or the banks for which three of my participants worked. In cases such as this I have had to rely on information gleaned from non-prompted comments made by the participant regarding work, or, after familiarity with the participant, through conducting an unstructured interview regarding work and other aspects of living late on in the study. The same was true of accessing data on the family spaces. Towards the end of the research period, I decided that it would be helpful to interview some of the parents of participants, to get an idea of the cultural and other influences that would be part of the family space. I tried to make these interviews as informal as possible. For example, to interview the parents of my close friends, I went to this friend's house and, if the parents were there, I would try to initiate a conversation which covered the points I had prepared. With participants with whom I was not on such close social terms, I would ask the participants if I could speak to their parents at some point to hear their opinions on the research topic. Some declined or did not follow up this request, but others agreed. Two participants who were not close friends of mine, but with whom I worked, both invited me to their home after work. From there I took the opportunity to 'interview' their parents. After each of these 'interviews' was completed, I would tell the parents about my research if they didn't already know, and ask them if they had any objections to the inclusion of material gleaned from the interview. The interview is a particular type of social space and hence terrain for a different type of identity construction, but since I had built up an empathy with the participants, and because of the highly informal nature of the interviews, I feel I obtained fairly 'translated', truthful and accurate responses

from the participants about how they felt they constructed their own identities in these situations. I have re-written these responses using the language of academia.

Gaining access to a social situation was just the first step. Just as difficult was interacting with the group in order to collect data. Although there is much literature on procedures for the selection of participants, there is little to indicate how long an participant should be shadowed for information, at what point interviewing the participant (formally or informally) would be most fruitful, or even whether all the information gleaned from the whole time period spent with the participant (contradictory or not) should be used. The duration of time for which I found it necessary to work/play alongside a participant depended greatly on the relationship with the participant: in particular whether I felt the relationship had reached a degree of normality/stability. I continued to see other participants regularly or periodically once fieldwork began. Others I saw well before the commencement of the official fieldwork period. I used Evans' (1986:70) suggestions for establishing an ethnographic research project to help in judging whether data derived from participant observation was adequate. He asserts that the researcher must:

1. Stay in the community for some time;
2. Be geographically close in terms of place;
3. See the subjects in their daily lives- their social circumstances;
4. Be familiar with the language of those studied;
5. Have intimacy with those studied; and,
6. Be aware of the 'general consensus' of subjects meanings.

If we accept these, or a set of rules similar to the above, we may conclude that in this situation, as a British Asian researcher, that even before I started the research, I had a certain advantage in the research process. Firstly, access to some of the participants' social spaces was not so difficult as, aside from those who were chosen from my peer groups, I was able to 'blend in' easily because of my colour. It is hard for many communities, especially those that are well defined and based on observable characteristics, to be penetrated by some one

who is seen as an 'outsider'. Secondly, because of my prior familiarity with some of the lifestyles and subcultures of the participants I had to spend less time in becoming intimate with the some of the culture and with understanding language and behavioural differences. Of course this brings us back to debates both on identity and on representation, and how we bound cultures. I found that my familiarity with certain Muslim traditions, and some British Asians and youth cultures and languages, lent me an advantage in establishing relationships with the participants.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, over time, an understanding did develop to bridge the gap between myself and certain participants with whose lifestyles I was not familiar, such as the young Bangali boys. This allowed me to better understand the perspective from which they saw the world.

As Prus (1996) and Fortier (1998) point out, the basis of participant research lies in establishing some sort of a relationship with participants. The experience of it will depend greatly on the type of relationship created. The small age difference between myself and the participants aided integration into the different groups and the establishment of empathy with individual respondents. In some cases it also allowed enough distance for me not to have to be an integral part of the group dynamics that could have built up a particular 'image' of myself to the participants. For example, I was not expected to join in with the group in all activities in order to be given membership, whereas this might have been the case had I been the same age. My gender was both advantageous and disadvantageous, depending on the context. It was advantageous, for example, in gaining access to female participants' home environments, which would have been less likely if I was male. I also found it advantageous in that many males were quick to extend friendships, and at the youth club I was accepted into a male group because I was not seen as a threat to group dynamics

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<sup>3</sup> This is not to say that 'non-Asian' researchers cannot carry-out research like this, but some may have to spend longer periods in understanding and getting close to the subjects. In the end, familiarity and interpretation of the subjects is not defined by colour or nationality, but by experience.

or leadership. On the other hand it has been disadvantageous in terms of the way I could interact with some males and male groups, since I could not be seen as being too 'free' or too friendly with particular individuals.

The way participants saw me was fundamental to the quality of the data gathered. Prus (1996) notes that questions of access and the type of data gathered is influenced by the way participants understand the interests and identity of the researcher. Writing of his extensive time 'in the field' as a participant observer researching for 'Street Corner Society', William Foote Whyte (1996:29) notes that after asking a probing question, his main participant advised:

Go easy on that 'who', 'what', 'why', 'where', 'when', 'where' stuff ... If people accept you, you can just hang around, and you'll learn the answers in the long run without even having to ask the questions.

In Whyte's case, because the group were initially unfamiliar with him, his asking questions looked inappropriate, whereas many of the participants in my study were from social groups with whom I was familiar, even from my peer groups. This allowed me to ask questions without drawing attention to myself and without looking intrusive. As it was, many of the issues I wanted to address cropped up frequently in everyday conversations. Otherwise, I would ask questions only in an appropriate context. For example, watching the television programme 'EastEnders' with the young men at the youth club often yielded much information, as issues raised on the programme and individual characters and ways of life were often discussed by the group. I often found it possible to initiate or sustain conversations and discussions by a carefully chosen comment.

As with any relationship, the researcher often has to strategize in order to achieve research objectives. The researcher has to be astute in deciding whether to 'perform' for the participants, when to keep quiet and what to say when s/he speaks. Thus, Shaffir (1998), writing of his fieldwork researching orthodox Jewish groups, notes that it was important

that the group saw him as someone who was sympathetic to them. He comments that the way his personality and opinions were perceived was also important in gaining access to settings and in building up a rapport with participants. During my fieldwork, even with participants that I knew well, in discussions or conversation, I had to decide whether to contribute or not, and what my contribution would be. With the participants I did not know, at the start of the relationship, I was very careful not to reveal too much about myself, in case the participant should create a particular image of me that would prevent access to certain settings or data. At times I slipped up, as I did not wish to 'perform' or just could not 'hide' my views, as in the occasion after one of the Islamic lectures when a participant asked me whether how many times I had read the Qur'an in Arabic and I replied that I could not read Arabic. The young man was shocked and told me he was disappointed with me. After that incident he distanced himself from me. From this I learnt that I would have to employ some 'impression management' (see Walsh 1998). I would have to be more rigorous in 'hiding' certain aspects of myself from the participants until I had managed to establish a relationship with them. After establishing a relationship I could air some opinions. Only after I was sure of the security of the relationship could I reveal more of myself without fear of jeopardising the research or overly dictating the data gleaned. With the participants chosen from my peer groups, I had already reached this stage before the commencement of the initial fieldwork, whereas with others I had to proceed more slowly.

As Grills (1998b) asserts, politics are a feature of any relationship and of the ethnographic process in general. In his ethnographic study of the members of a political group, he had to decide whether to show his own political beliefs or to remain neutral. As I experienced, it is not always easy or beneficial to remain neutral. One incident I encountered where neutrality was not a good strategy occurred between myself and one of the young men at the club who was a little mentally disabled. During a game of pool, he started to swear at me, and later tried to create some friction between myself and some of other young men in the club. The others seemed to be quite protective of Ashraf because of

his condition, as they did not reprimand him for his verbal abuse to me, even though others were frequently told off for swearing in front of me, let alone to me. For this reason, and because I felt I was still 'an outsider', I decided not to comment to any of the other young men that Ashraf had been telling them lies. The situation soured further, and I noticed that some of the young men stopped approaching me. At that point, it was too late to try to redeem myself by pointing out that Ashraf had been trying to cause trouble. Luckily, shortly afterward, on another occasion, Ashraf swore at me again, and one of the group leaders with whom I had struck up a friendship, reprimanded him loudly, telling him that everyone knew that he was trying to "stir things up" in the club. After that, Ashraf stopped being abusive, and the incident was quickly forgotten, with the dynamics of the club returning to normal. However, had Ashraf not been reprimanded by the other youth, I might not have been able to redeem my relationships with the others.

As well as the skills required in initiating and maintaining a relationship, you need a certain amount of luck in fieldwork. I had my fair share of it. In my first few days at the youth club, one of the leaders of the group struck up a conversation with me, and we got on well. He introduced me to some of his friends who were also strong characters within the group. After that, acceptance and regard from most of the others was quickly extended. Had I started a relationship with the other female youth-worker present, who I later learned was not well liked by the group, I might have had more difficulty in establishing relationships with the young men.

Another bit of luck came in the form of another researcher who was working as a youth-worker at the club at the time I started. I learnt a lot from his mistakes. I saw that he asked too many questions and in too obvious a manner. From this observation I made it a point to wait for conversations rather than ask direct, unprompted questions. Also, on occasion, some of the boys would talk about him, allowing me to learn about how they perceived him. In one conversation they told me that they did not like the way he dressed.



They said that he had asked them if he could accompany them on a jaunt to a nearby estate, but they declined because they did not wish for him too be seen as part of their group. This was because of the way he dressed, which they described as "Marks and Spencer man". From this I learnt that my appearance would be very important in accessing certain social spaces, and so I adopted an image that would help me fit in better with the group.

Prus (1996) suggests that the personality of the researcher and the relationship that s/he can establish is paramount in ethnographic research. Part of that relationship depends on transcending the boundary between researcher and researched. Shaffir (1998) notes that although he informed participants in his study that he was a student and researcher, this meant little to them. They were more concerned with his personality and his personal interests in convincing them to allow him access to the group. In the same way, as I have already noted, there were numerous reasons why I was allowed a degree of access to a number of participants, including my age, colour and gender. The fact that many were chosen through snowball techniques was also helpful, in that I already had relationships with common friends or acquaintances. I also found that, because of the slow approach I took with the fieldwork, participants would often 'forget' what I was there for (see also Fortier 1998). My position as youth-worker at the youth club, also seemed to overshadow my role as researcher. One example of this was from Ibrahim. When a full-time vacancy opened up at the youth-club, he asked me whether I was going to apply for the position. I replied that it was a full-time position, which meant that I would not have the time to attend college. To this, he asked me what I was studying at college, and I had to remind him of my research. Others, I felt, did not believe me, as they had already encountered one researcher, and to them I did not fit this mould. Yet others seemed disinterested in why I was there, just the fact that I was there and was 'OK' seemed to be enough for them. Some however, occasionally remembered my purpose. On one occasion, after a lengthy conversation, I received the comment from Jamal: "are you going to put that in your thesis?".

The way the ethnography was carried out made it very difficult to address the ethical issue of consent from all participants. Grills (1998b) notes that although 'informed consent' from subjects is a fundamental ethical principle of social research, in carrying out ethnography, where access and 'tainting' of the data may be problems, 'the issue is not straightforward. As Thorne (1980) puts forward, informed consent assumes a formality, for example where a researcher can approach a group, ask for consent and be granted it or turned away. She asserts that many research projects, especially those involving ethnographic techniques, do not have structures or opportunities for seeking consent in this way. Writing of her own research, she decided against seeking consent of participants, as it involved on-going group interaction. In this study, priority in seeking consent was given to the main participants in the work. This involved obtaining consent from the youth club first, with an introduction to the young people who were at the youth club indicating that I was a worker there and also undertaking research. When these participants were 'followed' to places of employment they were aware of the ongoing nature of my research, although as indicated above some did not always recall this. For the college I attended the situation was somewhat different, for while permission was gained from the college itself, this came with a proviso that I did not inform the other members of my classes that I was undertaking the study. I was already aware that other colleges were not prepared to allow me to participate on courses, so this raised a quandary. After discussions with others about how to respond with this offer, I decided to proceed. There are two issues of relevance here. In much of the writing about the ethics of fieldwork, there appears to be an assumed distinction between fieldwork and non-fieldwork, as well as between participants and non-participants. As I have indicated, in this research this was a false distinction. The priority I provided in this research was on ensuring that its main participants were aware of the nature of my undertaking. But it had already been realised that in the course of the fieldwork I would meet many people who had a very tangential role in the research, yet who might say something or act in a particular way that drew a response from my participants that was of theoretical importance. To ensure everyone I met in the course of the fieldwork was told

from the first moment I was a researcher would not simply have made these people think I was 'strange' but would also have sent strange signals to my main informants (having a fetish or 'hang-up' about my 'status' springs to mind). Moreover, given the ethnographic style adopted in the thesis, in which my own experience is integral, I would have to seek the informed consent of various subjects, past and present, including those not strictly in the formal 'fieldwork', all of whom contributed to the production of my knowledge and this study. The suggestions by those expounding reflexivity encourage us to see how knowledge of our subject is an on-going process, experienced not just in the field but through the course of our everyday lives and experiences. This is what I have sought to achieve here. In this regard, I have embodied some material from those who did not know this research was being conducted, for there are obvious difficulties seeking consent from all people we meet who influence us, cause us to think or have ideas that prompt our own. Of course there is the issue that as researchers, as well as our verbal articulation of our ideas in our everyday spaces of interaction, we produce texts with a wider accessibility, which can be seen as authoritative. As Keith and Pile (1993b:23) suggest of Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses*, in speaking from a position of power and privilege, "... he was gifted with a voice that alone drowned out the hurt protestations of the faithful, whose very faith had systematically been used historically as the medium of their degradation". Our texts have the ability to inform and represent, but also to be appropriated by the powerful, against the less powerful. Informed consent cannot ensure this does not happen but we do need to be cautious about how we represent people in our texts. In the next section, I address the issue of the ability of texts to represent social research.

### **Interpreting data and writing texts**

The problems around issues of reflexivity and representation have another, even greater implication that has commonly been mentioned in the social science literature, but recently it has become a major point of discussion. Most social scientists accept that individuals are subjective, but fail to apply this to themselves (Grimshaw and Hart 1995). If we are to

accept that we too are subjects, never able to wipe out our gendered, classed, ethnic, cultured experiences, then: (1) the work that we produce, the texts, are a product of this; and (2) the way in which texts are read will also be dependent on the reader's interpretation. Some have argued that this has led to solipsism and an unengaging celebration of texts merely as fictional creations of the author (Ahmed and Shore 1995). Others maintain that a recognition of the way in which knowledge is produced serves to "...strengthen the awareness and discipline of our academic endeavours" (Atkinson 1990:3). Objectivity, they argue, is impossible given the "... intentionality of consciousness as an initial assumption" (Evans 1986:18). As Hastrup (1996:4) argues: "There is no way of seeing from nowhere in particular", the event and action that we observe makes sense only through application to the researcher's own social experience. That social experience is "... mediated by interpretation, which again is always socially based" (Hastrup 1996:4). Social wisdom comes not from abstract thought but from grounded thought and participation in a variety of socio-cultural spaces. Fujimura (1998:349) and others argue that all scientists, whether social and natural, are constructivists: "... with particular desires, dreams, cultural resources, and technical competencies in their toolkits, they construct new realities as well as new representations". Hence, the production of social knowledge is the creation of linguistic, cultural, structural and psychological factors.

Many of the problems outlined above, of interpretation or analysis of data, such as discrepancies between articulations and actions, but also precise meanings attached to particular terms or words, can be more easily overcome with greater familiarity with research participants. I spent a lot of time observing and listening, especially at the early stages, rather than asking specific questions. This enabled me first to understand the specific meanings attached to the words participants used. In the first weeks at the youth club it certainly became apparent that words I used in certain ways were used in quite different ways by the young men. One example was when one of the younger boys spoke of 'Brian' one of the older youth-workers, when he was telling them off in his usual brusque manner,

saying he was a 'chief'. Two things guided my initial understanding of what they had meant by the word 'chief'. Firstly, to me the word 'chief' means a leader, some one who organises and takes control. The second thing that guided my understanding was that the boys were annoyed that 'Brian' had told them off. So although, 'chief' generally has a positive connotation to it, the fact that he told them off, and they frequently argued with him, made me think it was negative label. I came to the final conclusion that 'chief' did mean leader, etc., but with the negative association of 'bossiness' or 'uptightness'. With further familiarity with the boys, on hearing this word used again in different contexts and seeing them interact with 'Brian', I realised that it was in fact a term of respect, with an attachment of incredulity to it, which only in some circumstances lent itself a certain negativity. For example in the way the word 'chancer' may be used for some one who takes great risks, though not always honestly.

With regard to the interpretation of social data, critics have not been particularly forthcoming with proposals for assessing researcher's assumptions on the group being researched. However, in clinical psychiatry one finds some prescriptions for overcoming certain problems associated with prior familiarity, or even 'common-sense knowledge', of the group studied. Burnham and Harris (1996:139), for example, when writing of the ways a therapist may approach clients from other ethnic groups, prescribe that before meeting the client the therapist must make her/himself aware of her/his own assumptions. This could be done by noting 'cultural, personal and professional values' in relation to client dilemmas. Once these assumptions have been identified as 'hypotheses, hunches or musings', the therapist (or researcher) becomes more aware of how they may affect the interpretation of the client (or researched), rendering them available for deconstruction. These assumptions could also be used to explore the relational theme connected to it, through questions and discussion with the researched. During my research time, I looked back at expectations I had on what I would find, and compared these to experiences 'in the field'. In some cases, I found there were significant differences between the two. In performing this comparative

task, I was made aware enough to challenge some of my own assumptions. An example of this was one of the most important aims of the research (for me). I had wanted to write against culture, thinking that I would find a significant departure of the cultures of the young people from that of their parents, but what I actually found did not fit neatly with my expectations. I doubt, however, that I have been able to counter all my prior assumptions. Partly for this reason I have outlined my aims and expectations in this chapter, and have weaved my own experiences into the study. In this, my approach sits comfortably with that of Becker (1970), who encourages us to engage with participant observation, as he believes that being in a place, amongst a people, causes us to rethink our ideas about it. Certainly, throughout the extended fieldwork, some of my assumptions were challenged, and what I experienced frequently surprised me.

Some ethnographers have noted that data of an 'emotional' nature, such as feelings towards participants, about a group and about the research process are also important sources of information to draw on when analysing the data (e.g. Douglas and Johnson 1977, Katz 1988, Widdowfield 2000). Most commentators on ethnographic techniques suggest that the researcher should keep a field diary in which detailed notes on observations as well as emotions should be made. I followed this advice. A detailed diary did help remember data. In addition, as a researcher is constantly theorising in her/his head and attaching meanings to situations, when I looked over my field notes, I saw that my interpretations of the meanings of behaviour had changed. This, I felt, was important and should not be dismissed as it tells me about my own understanding, and helps me to remember to review my thought processes, and question how I came to the conclusions I make.

Another problem with interpreting data and then writing texts is that they are both forms of discourse embedded in contexts of understanding, and particular social realities. Common or public views of reality can only be set through negotiation and agreement. Sets of formal rules and frameworks for interpretation and analysis are part of the system we call

'culture'. The rest are the symbols that are generated from these accepted views of reality. Hence, a reality is specific only to the cultural group that holds it. Even then, individual interpretations may vary because of the nature of the way the agreement is set; through a negotiation of words and thought, which can never be fully 'understood' by another individual. Hence, a researcher can never claim to fully understand what she is researching. In the same way, the reader can never hope to fully understand what the researcher is writing.

As Atkinson (1990:7/9) writes:

...the notion of reflexivity recognises that texts do not simply and transparently report an independent order of reality. Rather the texts themselves are implicated in the work of reality construction.... Our experience of the world, both physical and cultural, is always mediated by conventions of inquiry and that experience is equally mediated by conventions of writing.

This is a further reason for relaying the *complexity* of the research processes in a textual form. When writing ethnography, researchers aim to translate what they have learnt in the field into text. In effect they are trying to reproduce one social space in another. But, this whole object is problematical, since action, speech and writing are each very different forms of discourse, linguistically and structurally (see Filmer et al (1998) for a discussion). As Hastrup (1992, 1996) states, there is such a fundamental difference between words and social process that this cannot be tackled through language. This point is also made by Marcus and Fischer (1986:68) who believe that text is a poor representation of social discourse, "...since oral discourse is labile, continually monitored, and modified by both parties, a text is an extremely poor, if not outright false representation of such discourse".

The difficulty in writing a study of this type is that it must try to avoid 'objectifying' the social relations examined (Routledge 1996). Because social phenomena may be constantly changing in relation to other processes, and because they are not 'objects', it is a difficult task to describe whole processes and interconnections. How can one avoid freezing the action and thereby objectifying it, leaving the description of the social phenomena as not

just partial, but a thin strand in a very complex web, where the interconnections are constantly changing? Keith and Pile (1993b:28) note that in representing social relations, we can only present a 'snap-shot in time-space':

... in order to make sense of a particular moment or a particular place,... this process is stopped to reveal an identity that is akin to a freeze-frame photograph of a race horse at full gallop. It may be a 'true' representation of a moment but, by the very act of freezing, it denies the presence of movement. The photograph represents a momentary stop in this gallop, simultaneous real and unreal, it is a moment at which closure occurs.

Young (1990b:303) similarly notes that in defining and describing, most texts usually end up presenting identity as 'a closed totality', with the exclusion of some elements and the inclusion of particular others. This also presents a difficulty in writing up data, as in this study, where artificial 'divides', for example, the organization of material into sections on different social spaces, have had to be created in order to emphasise certain themes. Certain forms of writing, and presentation are unable to capture process. Instead they merely relay a moment within that process. Use of the narrative method is one way in which both the fluidity of such processes and the subjectivity of the experience might be presented. Narrative methods are commonly thought of as a mode of representation, as a method of presenting personal and historical information (Gutting 1996). Recently, US sociologists have suggested that the narrative method is much more than just a method of data presentation, that "... the narrative is linked fundamentally to questions of both social epistemology and social ontology" (Somers 1994:606). The narrative method is particularly useful in writing ethnography because social life is not lived by humans in terms of discrete links to resources and influences. It is lived as stories, as narratives of social life, both real and imagined (arguably the same thing), which help to guide and sort an individual's experience. In presenting the ethnographic data in this study, I have tried to use a narrative technique, outlining the context of action and then, as far as possible, relaying the actual words spoken by participants and their emotional content. I have tried as far as possible to make the voice sound as if it is coming from the participant and not from me. For this, I



have used quotes from participants to illustrate points, rather than summarising the speech in my own words. Using the participants' own language also has the advantage of conveying some of the emotion of the moment, even if this sometimes means employing 'street language'. Although this method might not be thought of as strictly 'narrative', it nevertheless aims to incorporate a narrative-inspired method in the description of the social realities in the study

With regard to the criticism of text as a different discourse, as unable to represent social action within its pages, I follow Grills' (1998c:200) suggestion that the ethnographic text is not useless in conveying a social reality. Problems of translation are inherent all forms of discourse that aim to recreate a social reality:

The written ethnography is in fact made up of multiple realities- that of our informants, of the ethnographers experience and the disciplinary truths of concept and theory,... they mingle together to create a new reality- that of ethnography.

The social realities that researchers are studying are also created by the researcher, but what the ethnography does is valuable in that it creates an inter-subjectivity from the experiences of the researcher and the researched. The text may not be able to convey the social realities researched as accurately as we might like, but this does not mean we cannot do justice to themes, presenting them as clearly and in as best a way as we can as text. As such we can view the written ethnography as a 'partial truth' created through the politics of the interaction between researcher and research (Clifford 1986).

## Participant Profiles

**Divia<sup>1</sup>**, was an 19 year old Hindu-Gujerati female, who's parents had initially migrated from India to East Africa and then to the UK. I met Divia at the further education college I attended as part of the research. She was on a different course, but we were introduced as she was part of the same peer group as Shahid, one of the other participants. Divia and I got along well, and I would sometimes join her and her friends on trips to the cinema or shopping during the day. Later, she was able to help me secure a part-time job at the DIY store where she worked at weekends. She is still attending further education college and living at home until she marries, early next year.

**Mohammed** was 24 years old, of rural Bangali parents. I met him when he was a part-time youth worker for Camden council. He would occasionally be at the youth club where I worked, as he coached some of the boys in football. He is the eldest in a large family. Although I have a friendship with Mohammed, it was much more difficult to access many of Mohammed's spaces of interaction. I met with his family only once, at his sister's wedding, as his parents would have disapproved of his close friendship with a female. As such, I could not interview his parents as he said that he had to be a responsible role model for his younger brothers and sisters. Although I did get to meet some of his friends, including Jamal and Bobby and his long-term girlfriend, I was not introduced to any of his other peer groups. He is currently working as an administrator in a bank.

**Jamal** was 24 years old when we met in the first year of my field work. He is of rural Sylheti, Muslim, 1<sup>st</sup> generation immigrant parents. He is a childhood friend of Mohammed's. He attended university and has a job at a well-known investment bank in their IT division. I had the opportunity to get to know Jamal very well, and to meet with a number of his friends and family as well as various peer groups. I did not interview his parents formally, but was able to glean information from them during formal occasions. His job offered him the opportunity to work in New York, and he has been there now for 18 months on and off.

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<sup>1</sup> Participants' names have been changed.

**Tariq**, 23 years old, is originally from Yorkshire, but has been in London since commencing university. He is of working class Muslim Punjabi parents who first arrived in the UK 30 years ago. He is currently completing his legal training. Since Tariq became my partner, I have been able to access a wide variety of his social spaces, including that of his work, family and many peer groups.

**Tina**, 20 years old, I met during a summer job at Debenhams. As well as working alongside her part-time for 2 ½ months, on a couple of occasions I had the opportunity to socialise with her peer group outside of the work-place. On invitation by Tina to her home one evening, I also took the opportunity to interview both her parents. Tina's father co-owns an off-license and her mother looks after the family. I was not able to access her educational space, a further education college in west London.

**Malik**, Pakistani, and **Mustafa**, Sylheti-Bangali, both Muslim and approximately 19 years old, were recruited from the youth club which they attended irregularly. As well as the youth club, and events organised by the club, I would also accompany them 'hanging out' in the local area, and on one occasion spent an evening out in west London with them. As well as working with Mustafa, (and Malik for a shorter time) at MacDonalds, both were present on the trip to Cornwall organised by the youth club. Both were core members of a residential gang which operated in the local area. Malik and Mustafa both lived at their family home, although Mustafa spent many nights at friends' houses, returning home only infrequently. Malik's father works in a restaurant, while during the course of the field-work Mustafa's father spent much of his time in Bangladesh. When in the UK he is unemployed. I was not able to interview any of the parents.

**Neigar** 15 years old, Sylheti Muslim, **Shazia** 16 years old, Pakistani Muslim, and **Shamista** 16 years old, Bengali Muslim, were all friends who I initially met at the youth club. They were not regular attendees at the club, because of parental restrictions on their mobility. However Neigar and Shazia did attend the trip to Cornwall, by telling their parents that it was a school trip. On invitation, I accompanied Neigar, Shazia and another friend on a shopping trip to west London they made while they were supposed to have been in school. The parents of all three girls were of rural backgrounds and all lived on or near the same housing estate with their parents, although Neigar's father seemed to be absent. After

seeking permission from Shamista and Neigar, I was able to interview their mothers, but neither of Shazia's parents.

**Sajeed and Bilal**, approximately 17 years old, both of Bangali origin, I initially met at the youth club where they were both regular attendees. As well as observing them within the club, I had the opportunity to accompany them on events organised by the youth club including the awards ceremony at the town hall, a theatre production, and the trip to Cornwall. Both were 'revived' Muslims and were regular attendees of the Islamic lectures. Sajeed had left school and started the local further education college while Bilal was still at school. Although Sajeed and Bilal both lived at home, I was not able to interview any of their parents.

**Asif**, 17 years old, of Bangali origin was an attendee of the youth club, but was not good friends with any of the other participants recruited from the club. His father works in the successful family catering business. As Asif did not have many close friends in the club, he did not attend the trip to Cornwall, but was present on some of the other outings organised by the youth club. He was particularly friendly, and thus, I was able to have frequent, extended conversations with him when the other participants were not present at the club. Asif was attending a further education college, studying Business studies. His ambition was to one day have his own successful business. Although he lived at home, I was not able to interview his parents.

**Karim**, approximately 16 years old, of Bangali parents, was also a regular attendee of the youth club. He was also present on the trip to Cornwall as well as other outings organised by the youth club. In addition, he would sometimes attend the Islamic lectures. On a few occasions I 'hung-out' with him and some of his peer group in the local area. He lived in the local area with his parents, though I was not able to glean much information about his background, nor was I able to interview his parents.

**Zainub**, 20 years old, I met initially at the Islamic lectures. She was a revived Muslim who had just started to wear hijab. On a couple of occasions after the lecture, I had the opportunity to go out with her and her female Muslim friends for a quick snack. On another occasion I met with her peer group at college, after she invited me to a talk taking place at

her university in East London. After that, I took the opportunity to use her university library, and meet with her on those occasions. I contacted her again towards the end of the research period and was able to interview her mother. She lived at home with her parents, who were from lower middle-class, urban Pakistan. Zainub wanted to continue her education after completing her degree, possibly remaining in academia. However, she also wanted to have a family and maybe return to Pakistan in the future.

**Aliya 21 and Khulsoom, 22**, sisters, were both recruited from my peer group. They are of middle-class, Muslim Indian parents. Both have completed a university degree, Khulsoom studying Law and Aliya, Bio-chemistry. The sisters both spent time away from home while at university but have since returned. As well as observing them with a number of different peer groups including at university, I had good access to their family space, which allowed me to speak frequently with their parents and aunts, and attend extended family gatherings, such as the marriage of an older sister. Aliya plans to marry next year to her boyfriend, a non-muslim Indian, while Khulsoom would like to move to Canada to improve her career prospects.

**Tunveer** was a Pakistani Muslim, 21 years old, who I had initially met as an undergraduate at university. He works for a large consultancy firm in IT. He became a participant of the study in the second year of the research after we bumped into each other while he was visiting his old department. I was able to access his work peer groups as well as that of friends from university. I was also able to interview his parents. His father works for a utilities company as an untrained engineer, and his mother looks after the house. Tunveer lives at the family home.

**Shahid** was an 18 year old Bangali Muslim. I met with him initially at the youth club where he was a particularly friendly and open with me. I also attended a media studies course with Shahid at further education college where I had the opportunity to access not only his educational space but also his peer groups outside of college. Shahid's father was irregularly employed, at one point, in the transport industry, and his mother was in Bangladesh for much of the duration of our friendship. I was not able to interview either parent. Shahid's ambition was to become a successful actor or television presenter.

**Raj** was a Sylheti Muslim, aged approximately 16-17 yrs. I met him during my time at the youth club. I had limited access to Raj's spaces of interaction outside of the youth club and events organised by the youth club such as the outing to the theatre production. I found out little about Raj's background, other than that he had lived his whole life on a nearby estate with his mother, and was still attending school, repeating his GCSEs. I was not able to interview his parents.

## **Chapter four**

### **Creating Ethnicities: Axes of Difference**

#### **Introduction**

I will argue in the following chapters that the identifications made by the young British Asians participating in this study were constantly changing according to the social context of interaction, in order to accommodate and re-evaluate linkages with other individuals and interest groups. This process of identity construction and re-construction, or identification, has been recognised as a tactic used by individuals of differing social groups as part of everyday interaction. What may make the processes enacted by young British Asians special is the peculiar perception of their ethnicities in/by different sections of British society. While one of the largest and most established ethnic groups in Britain, they continue to be seen as more 'different' than other ethnic groups (Hall 1995, see also Brodtkin 1998 for an American perspective). This construction of difference, I argue, has a significant impact on the identifications of these young people.

This chapter focuses on axes of social relations that have particular salience in the construction and perception of British Asian ethnic identities. The salience of these axes arises because of the ways they are constructed in different cultural spheres and because they may have been constructed to be representative of the more general differences between British Asians and the dominant groups in British society. In this chapter I will examine some of the 'axes of difference' which the study found to be particularly powerful in the construction of 'difference'. Following the proposition that ethnic identities are as much constructed by ascription by others as by self-ascription I argue here that there are material conditions and ways of being that are constructed as somehow more 'ethnic' than others. As well as being identified by the group themselves, ascription by others was found often to have the effect of creating an interest group, which subsequently draws on these as

ethnic resources. In this chapter, we will see how these differences were constructed by the various actors within the spaces of interaction of the young participants.

The main axes of difference considered here are physical appearance, social class, gender and religious conviction. All too often these axes are seen as immutable conditions, or naturalised categories, and not as constructed differently within different spheres of interaction. Furthermore, as Gardner and Shukkur (1994:142) point out: "... accounts have tended to highlight the cultural insularity of South-Asian communities and their fundamental social and cultural institutions, rather than the relations between different groups and mainstream culture". Taking heed of this criticism, I shall look at the contribution of these axes of difference to social interaction. I will argue that it is not the materiality of these categories that contribute to the way an individual constructs identity, but the way in which these categories are socially constructed and perceived in the different cultural spheres in which the individual interacts.

The practical necessity of artificially separating these axes of social relations is not meant to suggest that these axes do not reinforce, undercut or change perceptions of each other in the construction and perception of particular identities. Furthermore, the sections below are not an exhaustive account of the ways in which these constructed differences impacted on identifications. Rather they are a brief presentation of the issues, with further examples of the construction of ethnicities through these axes of difference appearing in Chapter five.

## **Physical appearance**

Physical appearances have an extremely strong impact on the way people are seen (see Crowley 1999), but the perception of an individual or group depends on social context and on the cultural and personal preferences of the 'viewer'. Material objects in particular act as markers of social identity in all cultures, for example in many cultures married women wear a ring on one of their digits or some sort of special facial adornment to signify their marital status. Material markers are used for everything from religion and religious inclination to



sexual openness and life-stage. There are also more subtle markers that have evolved within cultural frameworks, such as clothing, jewellery and hair styles which convey or decipher status, cultural affiliations and even lifestyle choices of the wearer. But far more important and unchangeable as a marker of perceived group identity has been the colour of one's skin (Mason 1995).

### **'Blackness' and colour of skin**

There has been some reluctance recently by academics to engage with issues of intensity of skin colour *per se* (Sibley 1995), as it seems on the surface a little simplistic to attribute racism to pigmentation. Most commentators, however, would agree that notions of difference are especially strong when predicated on physical markers, especially skin colour (Young 1990a, Anwar 1998).

Colour has been recognised to be a factor that has strong inferences linked to it, for example, emotional states like love, jealousy and anger are linked to certain colours. Black and white in particular have been used in a dialectical way to depict emotional states and personal characteristics. Binary constructions such as enlightenment/ignorance, honesty/dishonesty, good/evil, pride/shame, healthy/diseased, dirty/clean, life/death and so on, all carry such colour connotations, with 'black', the vast majority of the time, depicting the unclean or ungood (Jordan 1974). The colour signifier is not only used by 'white' western society but elsewhere in the world (Labelle 1978, Bonnett 1997). As one example, distinctions based on colour are made in the Indian formal caste system, in informal social structures, and in Indian cultural codes of beauty. In western society black and white, and colours in-between, embody and represent sets of social and power relations (Sibley 1995), and have been used a primary visual marker of difference, with a greater intensity of pigmentation normally depicting a greater difference.

Furthermore, colour of skin lends itself easily to the backing up of racist discourses that place different people in a 'racial hierarchy', based on the (disproved) theory of evolution of races; the 'Negroid', and 'Dravidian' 'races' being the most primitive and the 'Aryan race' the last to evolve (Sibley 1995). The link between colour and incivility has a long history in western thought. This dates back to before the Middle Ages, and was later reinforced by colonial discourse, where colour was used as a signifier of barbarity and thus legitimised the domination and exploitation of colonies as a mission to civilise and bring god to the 'black barbarians' (McClintock 1994). It is still interpreted today as a signification of incivility and even laziness or criminality (Gilroy 1987, Keith 1996).

Skin colour, as we shall see in the following chapters, plays a significant role in whether one is considered as belonging to the nation. Hence, it influences feelings of belonging to a nation, as brown or black skin colour is often perceived, not just in Britain, as signifying difference through a different origin (Crowley 1999). This overt marker of constructed difference is used by both white British people and by the young British Asians to delineate ethnic boundaries, to decide who is included and who is not, who is different and who is the same (Li 1988). As Chambers (1993:154) notes: "... colour is a loaded signifier, an ethnic signal, it stands in for a range of meanings: linguistic, historical, and cultural". Although British Asians may not necessarily see themselves as being so different from other British groups, because of colour difference, others may view them as different, ascribing them differing ethnicity. Colour serves as an easily identifiable, ready-made boundary to decide who is included, who is different, and importantly, what those differences may be.

The young British Asians in this study often made distinctions between themselves and others based on colour. The choice of friends and peer group, for example, was often initiated through colour distinctions or similarities. A couple of young males explained to me at the youth club that they did not keep many 'English' friends. They said: "I wouldn't try

talking to a white person, cos you know they won't understand", and "if I had a problem, I'd only talk to one of my English friends if I wanted a western angle on things". In this instance, as with many others, the boys were differentiating primarily by colour, deciding that 'white' people are different and would have a different and *incompatible* perspective to their own. As a further example of the use of colour to demarcate an ethnic group, or an interest group, by the young British Asians included comments made by Malik while working at McDonalds. We were both serving at the front counter when a group of male youths, three white and one British Asian, approached Malik's till. They were all friends, but since they were each paying for their purchases separately, each gave his order separately. When completing the British Asian man's transaction, Malik, handing the take-away bag to the man, told him in Punjabi that he had put an extra portion of french fries in the bag. Giving away food was a practice that many of us at McDonalds did, but mostly only with homeless people. I asked Malik if the man was a friend of his, he replied that he was not. I then asked if he had given all the young men extra food. He replied no, that he had only given extra food to the British Asian man because he was "apnar loag" or 'our people', and that it was our duty to look after our own people.

As well as visually signifying 'sameness', in a context where there are people of different 'colours' the signification colour makes is that of 'different origins', and often extrapolated to 'different culture'. At a social gathering talking to a friend of a friend, into a conversation started by her about mixed parentage children, she asked where my parents were from. When I replied they were both from the Indian Sub-continent she was shocked. She said she thought I was of mixed background. When I asked why, she replied first that I did not look 'very Indian', and that I did not 'really act it either'. Due to the colour of my skin, it had been assumed that I was of 'mixed heritage', and this perceived 'diluted Indianess' of origin, conveniently directed and reinforced what she saw as 'un-Indian' behaviour. I wonder whether, if I had behaved in the way (that she perceived to be 'un-Indian'), but had darker skin, she would still have assumed I was of mixed parentage.

That such associations are easily made was brought home to me after another incident, when it was I who had slipped into this essentialist way of thinking. I met a young woman at a bus stop and started talking with her. Early in the conversation I found out that her father was Bangali and her mother Greek. When she told me this I found that I was taken aback, because her features looked to me to be typically 'Asian'. During the conversation we had, each time she would mention Greece or referred to her Greek origin it would surprise me a little and cause me to look closer at her. Visually, through her colouring and features, I saw this woman as 'Asian', and, therefore, conceptually saw her as Asian.

In the same way that sex is often mistaken as a signifier for gender or/and sexuality, colour of skin is often mistakenly used as a signifier for ethnicity. Frequently, through constructed difference based on skin colour, the construction is actively taken one step further and related to ideas of nationhood and belonging. The result is that those who are black or brown are seen as unable to be truly 'British' or 'French' or whatever (Sarup 1994). Lord Tebbit's cricket test comments, for instance, are indicative of the perceived reducibility of colour to a particular ethnicity, and so to the validity of excluding blacks and Asians from the imaged nation. This study found that young British Asians were well aware of this exclusion from the imaginings of the nation on the basis of skin colour. Jamal, for example, said that when asked by people in the UK 'where are you from', he always replied that his family were from Bangladesh. He told me he knew that, because of his skin colour, the inquiry was not about his present area of residence, but about his origins, which categorised him as 'originally not from here'. He expressed the belief that white Britons were never questioned about their origins, although they might also be from outside of Britain.

The significance of colour in constructions of difference and national belonging is not restricted to the UK. The next example also highlights that although whites maybe asked where they are from, the question, when directed at 'coloured' people, has quite a different

meaning. In a retail store in Brussels I was speaking to the store manager in my broken French about a product. As the conversation became technical and out of my grasp, he asked me what language I spoke. I replied that I spoke English, and he asked me where I was from. When I said that I was from London, he repeated the question, again I replied 'London', and again he repeated the question. When finally I said "My parents are from Pakistan and India, but I've lived in London all my life," he looked content with the answer, and said "I didn't think you are from London, because you are very brown". Being 'very brown' and being from London were incompatible to this man, and I do not think he was referring to the weather. Dorinne Kondo (1996:99) notes that the same logic has resulted in a continued persistence in defining the USA as 'white':

No matter how many generations Asian Americans are resident here, no matter how 'articulate' we seem, inevitably we will attract the comment "Oh you speak English so well," or its equivalent, "Where are you from?"- which somehow never seems to be adequately answered by Oregon or Illinois or New Jersey, for the question "Where are you really from?" is sure to follow.

The colour of skin is a potent signifier of a group(s) that are the focus of racism (Anthias and Yuval-Davis 1992). This racism is demarcated by the colour of skin but extensively uses other resources, some cultural, some linguistic, some phenotypic, in the racist construction. Shrage (1996:193) notes that in the United States there exists "...illusions of continuity between 'race', ethnicity, skin pigment, genealogy, character, behaviour, ability, aspirations, dispositions, and so on". This translates easily to certain physical features; for example, distinctive noses and large lips, which can be seen as unattractive in the contemporary western cultural definition of beauty. These other physical characteristics, often stereotyped into common usage, then come to be signifiers, and when a few are added together, this can make a person more likely to experience racist discrimination than others. For example, the wearing national of costume, distinctive physical characteristics, or certain personality characteristics are seen as particularly 'ethnic'

(Modood, Beishon and Virdee 1994). However, the effect is not necessarily cumulative, but a specific being is born of the intersecting of characteristics that are often used to bolster racist discourse.

The following example highlights that belief by the young British Asians that individuals who did not have dark skin and had more European-like features were less likely to experience discrimination. While working at Debenhams department store, Tina, a young British Asian colleague, applied for a job at Harrods, a store which was rumoured to be very difficult for ethnic minorities to find employment in, especially in the department in which we worked. After a successful interview, a group of female colleagues comprising myself, an Afro-Caribbean girl and a white girl were sitting in the canteen. Tina was giving us details of the interview and exclaimed that she could not believe that she had been accepted for the position. The white girl commented that she thought Tina had been successful because she was attractive and well-presented, while the black girl added that it was probably because she was fair skinned. The white girl expressed disbelief but Tina confirmed that at the end of the interview, the interviewer, not able to decipher her origins from her appearance or her Anglicised name, had asked her where she was from and commented at the reply that she looked Mediterranean. The black girl, and Tina herself, both felt Tina was lucky to have these kind of features rather than features more commonly associated with Asian women.

The desire to possess 'untypical' features or a lighter skin colour was not restricted to the young women mentioned above. Another of the participants of the study expressed the desire to be perceived as of origins other than South-Asian. Jimmy, a night-club DJ, changed to this anglicised version of his name shortly after he started in the music and entertainment business. He also added the fictitious surname 'Alvarez'. On the first occasion we met, he was talking with another person present. In their conversation, they were talking about Punjab. I asked Jimmy if his parents were of Punjabi origin, and he replied 'where do

you think I'm from". I said that his name 'Jimmy Alvarez' indicated that he might be of South-American origin. He seemed to be very pleased with my response, and talked on, for quite a long time, about how he is often mistaken for Hispanic or Mediterranean origin. The point is not just that he calls himself 'Jimmy Alvarez'. This could simply be a 'stage' name for DJ work. The point is that he is happy to be mistaken for something other than 'Indian'. For him, being seen as this something else, as Iberian, Hispanic, or whatever, is preferable to being seen as Indian. After I got to know Jimmy better, I asked him why he prefers people to think of him as something other than Indian. He said that being South American was "cool", whereas being Indian meant that "I'm just another Paki".

A further example of the perception that intensity of skin colour played a role in whether one was likely to experience racism or not was provided by Malik. One, evening, accompanying a group to a night-club, we were waiting in the queue to be let in. The boys were uncharacteristically quiet as some were a little anxious that the group would be denied entry. Malik, turning to Mustafa, said "it's your fault if we don't get in". I asked why. Malik explained that Mustafa was often turned away from night-clubs. They both believed that it was because Mustafa was exceptionally dark skinned (for further details on this incident see Chapter 5, pp.211). Crowley (1999:9), using the refusal of a couple of 'ethnic' minority youngsters into a nightclub as a metaphor for the way in which access to national belongings are negotiated, notes that the reason for non-refusal are "encoded in the pariah's appearance- indeed painfully so, since most of those who bother trying to get in at all attempt to improve their chances of exceptional leniency by hyperconformity in terms of dress-code and other requirements". As we will see in the following chapters, 'hyperconformity' was practised by some young people in certain spaces of social interaction. All the participants above were aware of the negative way in which pigmentation and certain phenotypic characteristics are used in racist discourse to define the racialised subject. Thus, by escaping perception as 'Indian', Jimmy and Tina could escape the racisms that accompany being of Indian origin. However, skin colour, and all that is 'encoded' in colour, is a difficult characteristic to hide.

'Ethnicity', conceived of popularly as belonging to a different 'culture', is often ascribed to people of a different colour. Synott and Howes (1996) note that Canadian policy uses the categorisation 'visible minority' to capture the way in which those who are non-white face discrimination on the basis of their skin colour. Similarly, Mason (1995:15-16) notes that in the UK, the use of the term 'ethnic minority' in popular and political discourse "... normally refers [to] skin colour. The essential characteristic for membership of an ethnic minority is having a skin which is not white". Ethnicity, marked out by colour, has long been a basic sorting mechanism for the application of supposedly corresponding characteristics, often used to bolster racist discourse. As Li (1988:23) explains: "...race and ethnicity take on social meaning and importance when physical and cultural traits are paired with social attributes, such as intellectual, moral, or behavioural characteristics'. Yet racisms based on colour can be context dependent: "While the category of Black skin signifies the category of people to denigrate and discriminate against, the specific contents of racial stereotyping and the ethnic boundaries it draws are not necessarily fixed or consistent" (Anthias and Yuval-Davis 1992:137). The discourses drawn on in discriminatory practices are often irrational and contradictory. Thus, black people can simultaneously appear in popular conceptions as both stupid and sneaky, or Pakistanis as being 'wimpish' or effeminate, and still violent (Modood, Beishon and Virdee 1994). As Brah notes, Pakistani women are at once exoticised as sensuous and characterised as ugly, smelly etc. The one signifier for all this is colour. As such, the 'coloured' subject can be subject to numerous racisms at the same time.

One example which illustrates this contradiction well are comments by Shazia on the youths who 'hang around' the shopping centre. Speaking of how she feels when she wears her salwar kameez when shopping, she told me that on some occasions, especially if she was alone or with her mother, the white youths would make sexual remarks as she passed, a common one being that she was 'full of eastern promise'. At other times, she professed that



they would call out racist comments to her and her brother. As well as highlighting the way that colour can be used to back up varied, and some times opposing, stereotypes, this account illustrates one of the constructed links between gender and race, where women are exoticised.

As Miles and Torres (1996:40) note, skin colour "... is a product of signification: human beings identify skin colour to mark or symbolise other phenomena in a historical context in which other significations occur". 'Blackness' is used as the primary visual characteristic which aids the demarcation of a group, around which popular discourse is created and applied to fit the situation (Alt 1998). In this manner, colour signification also contributes to stratifications of class and power in many societies, with a lighter skin commonly denoting a 'superior' position (Labelle 1978). It is this link between race and class which I will examine next. But the importance of the colour signifier should not be under-estimated. Even though the constant re-creation of cultural forms may be taking place among both young and old British Asians, colour, which cannot be changed, has remained strong in signifying difference; a whole imagined history from the country of origin, through colonisation and civilisation by the British, to factory labour in the East End of London. Thus those on the inside of the skins may forget, but those looking from the outside cannot.

## **Race and Class**

Many of the divisions and constructed differences that are drawn within British society, both in popular spheres and in academia, are based on 'class' differences. As such, class has been pointed to as playing a major role in identification. Belonging to a particular class, it is suggested, will affect an individual's life in innumerable ways (Devine 1997). Gerth and Mills (1991:14) point out that a whole range of life chances will be affected by membership of a particular social class: "Everything from the chance to stay alive in the first year after birth to the chance to view fine arts, the chance to remain healthy and grow tall, and if sick

to get well again, the chance to avoid becoming a juvenile delinquent [sic] and very crucially, the chance to complete an intermediary or higher education grade".

Asides from traditional Marxist conceptions of class, which focus strictly on production relations, the most common application of the term social class, in relation to ethnic minorities in particular, has been in the description of occupational structures (e.g. see Daye 1994). Explanations of the class positions of minority ethnic groups by economic processes often start from the arrival of immigrants in Britain, many as casual labourers or low paid public sector workers (Castles and Cosack 1985). Although many of the first generation South-Asian immigrants to the UK were mainly land owners from rural areas, and not the working-classes in their country of origin (Summerfield 1993, Carey and Shukor 1985), they entered the social structure in Britain as 'working-class' (Ballard 1994a, Layton Henry 1992). As well as discrimination from some white Britons, there are several reasons why they might have been placed in a low class position in the UK. Of the first generation members of ethnic minorities, most would have finished their education before migrating to Britain, and it has been argued that overseas qualifications were not regarded as highly by British employers. Others may not have been fluent in English and so could not secure anything other than manual work (Robinson 1997). Furthermore, recent arrival did not lend advantageous knowledge on where and how to build appropriate social contacts or on the working of the labour market (Heath and Ridge 1983, Anwar 1995). Numerous empirical studies have pointed to the relationship between 'race and class', sometimes highlighting the lack of social and occupational mobility (eg. Daye 1994, Brah 1994, Srinivasan 1995). The homogenising nature of much of this type of work has ignored the major class differences between the British Asian population (see Ballard 1997). Furthermore, the classificatory techniques used have assigned ethnic minorities to class positions which are inherently ethnocentric and may not reflect lived experiences, lifestyles and value-systems.

Today, some minority groups, such as Bangalis, do remain at the lower end of the occupational structure, showing a marked mal-distribution of advantage. However, this is not the case for all South-Asian minorities, who as a group now occupy a variety of positions within the class structure (Ballard 1997, Heath and McMahon 1997, Robinson 1997, Modood 1997a, 1998). As Table 4.1 shows, with the second generation, there has been a change in the class structure of British-Asians, with a greater proportion of second generation British Asians, especially Indians, in the higher groupings I, ~II, and III than for the first generation. Yet this model of class structure, based on the coding of social position by income level, occupational title and employment status (as devised by Goldthorpe 1980), may be adequate for analysing occupational structures, but as a determinant of the social class *positions* and experiences of ethnic minorities, it falls somewhat short in its one-dimensional, non-processual approach.

**Table 4.1: Social class by occupation, Spring 1995**

	Profess- ional %	Inter- mediate %	Skilled non- manual %	Skilled manual %	Partly skilled %	Unskille d manual %	No. 000s
Black	3	26	23	21	18	8	446
Indian	9	23	25	15	24	-	455
Pakistani/ Bangali	-	19	26	18	27	-	211
White	5	24	24	20	16	12	28,649

Adapted from Church and Summerfield (1996).

Like most socially constructed categories, there is some disagreement over how best to conceptualise 'class'. Some commentators debate whether social class can be assigned to the new, fragmented social divisions that have arisen with economic and political change (see

e.g. Clark and Lipset 1991, Pahl 1993, Houn et al 1993). However, definitions of class have recently become less rigid, including political polarisation along the axes of race and gender (Pahl 1989, Clark et al 1993). Some commentators have suggested that racism and discrimination are key to understanding the link between class and 'race' or ethnicity, with the concept of race invented during imperialist expansion to serve the capitalist mode of exploitation of labour force. Within this school of thought, struggles against racism therefore become class struggles against capitalist exploitation (e.g. Genovese 1999, Balibar and Wallerstein 1991, Sivanandan 1982, Miles 1982a). Yet other commentators suggest that a working-class status has been ascribed to ethnic minorities because of the formation of a visible underclass, and because of the political segregation of ethnic minority groups (Rex and Mason 1986). This theorisation of the link between class and ethnicity has ranged from viewing ethnic minorities themselves as a particular working-class, to highlighting internal differences within the ethnic minority groups and 'white' working-classes. Much of the literature until recently focused on issues of ethnicity and 'race' concerning only the working-classes. In part this is because these issues were seen as derivative of class formation, rather than as a component of it (Anthias and Yuval-Davis 1992). The increasing representation of British Asians in the middle-classes has only recently gained a place on the academic research agenda (Devine 1997).

But, as Anthias and Yuval-Davis (1992) point out, the link between ethnicity and class goes further than occupational structures. Similarly, Gilroy (1987) asserts that class structures need not be economic and reducible to production relations, but can include struggles over access to the control of information. Class can also be defined in relation to disadvantage and exploitation in a way that is not tied to the work-place. Gilroy identifies class in relation to hegemony, helping to understand the role of construction of 'race' (or ethnicity) within this:

... the causality of class [is] a complex, multi-determined process in which racialization currently plays a key part. The dominant and subordinate are ascribed by 'race'. It assigns and

fixes their positions relative to each other and with respect to the basic structures of society, simultaneously legitimating these ascribed positions. [...] It ensures [...] that for contemporary Britain, 'race is the modality in which class is lived'... (1987:29)

Noting the increased diversity of class positions within the black community, Gilroy (1987) asks how notions of shared history, culture and kinship, which inform ethnic collectivities, compare with identification based on work, wages, and exploitation.

In order to address this question, and the way class is inextricably linked to the construction of ethnicities, we must use the concept of class espoused by cultural studies theorists; as class consciousness (e.g. Williams 1980, Thompson 1963, Hoggart 1958). Using this approach, class becomes significant in the way it is experienced and lived by young people. In this chapter, I will examine an area which has been under-focused in the literature on British Asian identities; that of the contribution to ethnicities made by social class and class divisions. This section will examine the significance of 'class consciousness' in creating links between British Asians and other social groups, and also whether a concept of class is active in the drawing of boundaries between the young people in the study and other British Asians.

### **Culture, class consciousness and ethnic boundaries**

In order to explore fully the link between ethnicity and class, we have to go beyond economics and employment structures. Instead, I will follow a culturalist reading of class, privileging lived experience. Although traditionally 'class' has been used with reference to production processes, related sub-cultural forms have also been identified for different classes. Cultural processes are seen by some as inscribed with notions of class. Gregson and Lowe (1995), for example, note that the Victorian ideal of the middle-class woman was that of nurturer and home maker, all based in the home. The archetypal working-class woman, on the other hand, was seen to be a domestic labourer in other people's homes. Thus particular cultural forms are associated with particular classes.

Class structures, it is also noted, have long been associated with particular cultural values and lifestyles, and of heritage and ancestry (Szczelkun 1990). The national culture itself is informed by class and class distinctions (Devine 1997), and one possible reason why minority ethnic groups do not fit neatly into occupationally guided class domains, is because they may not exhibit the cultural forms commonly associated with different classes. There is in fact, as Ballard (1994a) points out, a great deal of difference between some British Asian working-class groups and their working-class white counterparts. Attitudes to work, saving, aspirations for the future, expectations for children and the drive for upward social mobility run counter to the cultural norms of some white working-classes (Ballard 1994b). These are different because the notion of 'class cultures' is ethnocentric, relating only to particular cultural forms amongst the British population, excluding those that may be present amongst ethnic minorities.

Take for example the case of Asif, age 17. According to his father's occupation as 'restaurant worker', he should fall into the occupational class structure as a semi-skilled worker, part of the working-class. However, his cultural and consumption patterns do not echo that expected of his occupation. His extended family live in Whitechapel. Asif's father puts in long hours at the family restaurant in order to save money to send back to his family, and to send his children to university. The children have been encouraged to stay on in education, with one son already studying computer sciences at a higher education college. Although the father enjoys occasional social activities outside the family home at his sister-in-law's house nearby, he very rarely visits the cinema, museums, or eats at restaurants. Except for occasions when they visit friends and family houses in other cities for Eid, father and son rarely socialise together outside the family home. Within this abridged description of their lives, there are certain patterns that do not fit descriptions and assumptions of the

lifestyles and value-systems associated in much of the literature with working-class cultures (see Pahl 1989, Bouamama 1995).<sup>1</sup>

Other young people in the study similarly did not fit the cultural patterns of class structure to which they or the household head's occupation belonged. A notable exception was Aliya and Khulsoom, whose father had a middle-class occupation. Their patterns of social activity were more like those of their white counterparts. Aliya and Khulsoom reported that they attended restaurants with their parents, and that their parents attended restaurants with their friends. They had recently returned from a family holiday in Greece. However, none of the other middle-class parents in the study had cultural patterns that resembled those described of the British middle-class. Even for those that exhibited some similarity of social and leisure patterns, this did not necessarily mean that young people or their parents identified with other (non-Asian) British middle-class groups.

Although Gallie (1988) and Jones (1993) have noted that ethnic minorities have to some extent been integrated into working-class organisations such as trade unions, this study found little identification between young people and their white class compatriots. The Bangali boys from the Hildon and Eubury area, as we will examine in more detail in the next chapter, identified strongly with some black working-class cultures. However, this linkage was forged partly on the basis of experiences of racism rather than a conscious class-based ethnic identification. Although McAll (1990) points out that class consciousness can exist without the actors understanding the structures that lie behind the experiences

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<sup>1</sup> For instance, Pahl (1989) identifies the characteristics that are representative of working-class cultures as including life centred around family, insulated households, little socialising with neighbours or friends who live outside of the neighbourhood, less frequent and varied social entertainment, living and working alongside fellow workers and a separateness of men and women's lives. Some of these characteristics apply to not just the working-class British Asians, but to those in middle-class occupations.

which relate to them, when compared with the lack of identification with white working-classes, the centrality of perceived commonalities, including that of racism and culture, are apparent in their identification with black working-class cultures.

During the course of fieldwork, the young Bangali men showed little identification with white working-classes, even those from their local area or in their work places. Strong and regular examples were made while watching television at the youth club. The television programme 'EastEnders' was particularly useful in opening up discussions of a class nature. There would be frequent exclamations from the young men and discussions around the characters and issues. Comments were made about the 'drinking culture', including derisory comments regarding the amount of time two of the Asian characters spent in the local public house. Furthermore, there was criticism from the youngsters about other aspects of working-class cultures, especially about the working-class family. A vociferous discussion took place while we watched one of the younger characters in the soap opera enjoying a drink with his mother. They were both smoking a cigarette and the young man swore in conversation with his mother. One of the boys exclaimed surprise, asking "how can they sit there like that drinking and smoking together". Mustafa replied that he would never smoke in front of any member of his family. Yet another added that he could never swear in front of his family. In the programme, the young man was asking his mother to respect his decision in regard to a personal matter. Again, the boys expressed disbelief. One said "he says- you should respect me- what about him sitting there smoking in front of his mum". Another said, "if I said that to my mum I would get one of her special back hands" [he did an imitation of his mother slapping him]. Another added, "yeah- he's the one who's got no respect". On another occasion, one of the characters had been fired from his job and had given up on a fruitless search for alternative employment. As he sat in the public house having a drink, telling his friend his financial troubles, some of the young Bangali men laughed and jeered. The comments that ensued were to the effect that he should take any job that was offered to him, and should not be spending money drinking if he was in financial difficulty.



Although the cultural forms played out by the characters in the soap opera were not necessarily typical of working-class cultures, these incidents point to a cultural divide between the boys and the characters represented, which prevents them from identifying on the basis of a common socio-economic background. In McAll's (1990:212) theorisation of the link between class and ethnicity, he suggests that class domains are ethnically constituted: "... in the sense that the 'upper-middle-class' domain in Britain is none other than 'upper middle-class' ethnicity. In this manner, regardless of the fact that the actors above may fall into the same class structure as the young Bangali men, their lived experience has not been similar to that of the young white working-class characters.

Halle (1984) found in his study on working-class lifestyles that 'race' prevented identification amongst different ethnic groups at the bottom of the class structure. Working-class consciousness itself, other have argued, include elements of racism and sexism (e.g. Fenton 1999). An attitude similar to that found amongst the working-class young people was found also amongst middle-class young people in the study. This contradicts Brenner's (1989) assertion that members of a class share common lived experiences, especially those generated at the workplace. Even young people whose parents belonged to middle-class occupational groups, and who had been or were in receipt of further education, such as Nita, Tina, and Khulsoom and Aliya, showed little identification with white middle-class individuals in their spaces of interaction. In fact, their comments often suggested that they held many individuals of white middle-class status in disdain. Both Nita and Tina commented on what they believed to be a 'pompous' and 'self-confident' nature of non-British Asian middle-class employees at their work and education places. Talking about a job interview which she had attended, Aliya used the words 'stuck up rugby boys' to describe some of the other interviewees. When asked, none of the young people mentioned above professed to be voting for the Conservative Party candidate in the upcoming London

mayoral elections.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, racial identities may undercut rather than reinforce class identification.

Srinivasan (1995) noted in her study of the British Asian petty bourgeoisie, that although small business owners technically belong to the middle-class, their lifestyle and value systems do not reflect this. Yet, she concludes, the British Asian petty bourgeoisie can not be described as 'working-class'. Wright (1989a) notes that many of those who are, by virtue of occupation, placed in the 'middle-class', occupy more than one class position at once. He describes their position as "... contradictory locations within class relations" (Wright 1989a:4). Although he applies this on a strictly Marxian level of class as production relations, this description of occupying contradictory positions within the class relation applies equally well if we view class as result of exploitation or domination of any sort, and if we take the primacy of class to be that of lived experience. I would conclude this 'contradictory positioning' through the experience of the young middle-class people involved with the study. They showed little middle-class consciousness. Indeed, they were derisive about characteristics exhibited by, or thought typical of, white middle-class individuals.

Gilroy (1987) has pointed out that although there is a discontinuity between the interests of the black petty bourgeoisie and the black working-class, they are still are very much a part of a self-conscious 'inclusive black community'. The solidarity, he suggests, might be based on a common history, culture, language and experiences of racism. The extent to which class consciousness amongst young British Asians may be based on notions

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<sup>2</sup> Voting behaviour could be a way differentiate between classes, with middle-classes more likely to vote for the Conservative Party (Heath and Savage 1995). However, as many of the young people were below voting age, and had little concept of the different parties, this means of analysis was not possible with all of the young people.

of shared cultures and experience is evident in the relationship between British Asians and blacks. A lack of identification and empathy between 1<sup>st</sup> generation Asian individuals and their black counterparts was strongly articulated in the interviews with parents, and has a basis in the socio-historic interaction between these two groups (see Chapter Five, Section two).

Identification by the younger British Asians in the study with black people was based on notions of shared experience, especially that of racism and discrimination. The Bangali youths in particular, who probably occupy the lowest class position amongst those in the study, did identify with the black working-class. They appropriated black sub-cultural styles, emulated creolised black languages and listened to black musics, especially those expounding the desire for material gains. Returning to a comment made by one of the young Bangali males in response to questions over his choice of black music with violent lyrics: "it's about us, we're from the ghetto too, y'know!", the basis of linkage in racial-class consciousness is explicit.

This intersection of class and race, the young people felt played a significant role in the way that they were perceived by others within their social spaces of interaction. Class differences when combined with 'racial' differences may have particular salience in the labelling of 'difference'. Mohammed, Jamal and Tariq, all in white-collar jobs but from working-class backgrounds, believed that their class backgrounds and perceived ethnicities reinforced each other. Mohammed believed that this worked against him in his work-place: "It's twice as difficult for me at work. I have to prove myself even more, try even harder to be one of the leaders of the team.... The whole building is full of floppy haired public school types. The only place you find any Asians is the mail room". In his comments, Mohammed was articulating the belief that, although he shared the same occupation, he was different from the 'public school types'. At the same time, he constructs his 'Asianess' as constituting a particular social class.

As well as class differences constructed and negotiated through race, it has been suggested that the intersection of race and class may, depending on the institutional structure, either augment or dilute racial identification (Omi and Winant 1994, Winant (1994). Alund (1997) has suggested that perceived cultural commonalities, or interests, act as a 'symbolic' integrative factor, and can cut across class positions. Certainly, the study found that in particular contexts, especially those where young people felt a cultural or racial threat, they would identify across the class boundaries of the British Asian population, drawing on (real or imagined) flexible notions of commonality or community (e.g. see Chapter Five page 41 ).

However, equally common were class differences constructed and drawn across the British Asian population, as a means of categorisation and differentiation by young people themselves. Whereas the classificatory criteria in use by their parents was found to be based loosely on social structures and regional typologies translated across from South-Asia,<sup>3</sup> this type of distinction was operationalised during the course of the study only by a small minority of young people. Constructions of social class based on occupational structures and cultural differences peculiar to the younger British Asian population were used far more frequently. Aliya, for example, started dating an Muslim Mauritian Asian security guard. One evening a close friend of hers from her school days expressed to me her disapproval of

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<sup>3</sup> Many of the parents used 'class' distinctions that have a basis in South-Asian societal stratification, differences based on rural or urban background, historical family status, including surname and occupation, the caste system by Hindus, and Islamic lineage and length of time the family has been Muslim by Muslims. Differences between cities, and regions were also drawn to make 'class' distinctions (see also Ballard 1997). For example, one of the young people's families, on first arrival in the UK, settled in Luton, outside London. The father explained to me that they left as soon as he could afford to because they were living next door to people from Mirpur (northern Pakistan). When I asked what was wrong with Mirpur, he replied that the type of people who came to Britain from there, had been "garbage collectors and road sweepers". He made this comment even though he had not known them personally.

their relationship. The friend believed that the differences in background between Aliya and her boyfriend made him an unsuitable long-term partner. She said: "I don't think it will last long. They are just so different. Aliya is so smart and he can barely put a sentence together". A little while later she added: "I really don't know what she sees in him. They don't have anything in common". Later, when I asked Aliya about the relationship and her friends concerns, she replied that she could see that her and her boyfriend were from different backgrounds and that there would not be a future in the relationship, but that she was merely having some fun'. Both girls had clear ideas about the boundaries within which prospective partners could be chosen. Class divisions were a crucial part of this boundary.

The issue of marriage partners was one that frequently suggested the importance of class differences within the British Asian population. During the period of fieldwork I first got to know Divia, she had just split from a three-year relationship with a young man of Hindu-Punjabi origin whom she had met at school. She said that she had thought it best to end the relationship because her parents would not have approved of a union. Her parents' desire was that she marry someone from her own Hindu-Gujerati background. Some time later, Divia met a Sikh young man, who she introduced to her parents. They subsequently approved that this man marry their daughter. I asked Divia whether or not her parents had concerns about the difference in religion, as she had previously stated they would have reservations about differences in regional background with the first young man. She at first replied that although they were of different religions, and of different regions, this was acceptable to her parents, because he seemed a 'nice boy'. Deeper into the conversation, it transpired that the decision was also based on class considerations. The second young man was of a considerably more secure financial status than the first. Furthermore, talking about the first man, Divia commented that she had realised when she met his parents that she would not have been able to spend long periods of time with his family. As they resided in local authority housing and lived quite differently to the way her family did, she believed his parents would not have 'fitted in' with hers. The concern about the class background of

her previous boyfriend showed that Divia was at least in part informed by pressure and influence from her family's cultural codes. Even though expectations of her family might have been ignored or countered in other contexts, such as her choice of peer group, marriage was perceived by Divia, and by many of the other young people, as being a 'last boundary' that is particularly important to their parents. It is an issue where young people tend to conform most to family expectations, and where we see the relative importance of class considerations and class divides within the British Asian population, as social class is an important consideration in making marriage matches. With the second young man, the greater similarity between his own and Divia's background, in terms of social class was sufficient to override religious and regional differences.

Class differences based on residential areas, and hence specific cultural domains, were also constructed and drawn by some of the participants. One afternoon, Shahid and a group of his British Asian friends from college, all from north and north west London, were deciding which night-club to visit that weekend. Interwoven in this discussion were considerations of where they would meet attractive women. One of the young men suggested a club in Hounslow, west London, an area with a large Asian population. Shahid, with his usual vivaciousness, replied, "Don't go down there, cos the girls come with hidden extras". The others laughed but the young man who had initially suggested the club in Hounslow, did not understand what had been said. Shahid elaborated: "Aids, VD, everything". Another added, "yeah, they're rough round there, it's a totally different scene". As the discussion progressed, I was aware that they were drawing explicit class distinctions between themselves and the residents of Hounslow. As Bachu (1996) has noted, although cultures are produced in multiple sites, they are also the product of a locality. A 'local' cultural element was also apparent in this class distinction. The Bangali boys, although from similar socio-economic backgrounds as the Hounslow residents to which they referred, were part of a young British Asian culture that did not encourage young women to engage openly in

casual relationships. To enter social arenas such as night-clubs and bars or public streets unsupervised or unrestricted was frowned on.

This appearance of a cultural element within social class was evident in many other situations. To provide one further illustration, one evening at Jamal's house, he and another friend were discussing the latest boyfriend of a British Asian female friend of theirs. They were often disconcerted by her choice in men and were having an animated conversation about the current one. Jamal had met him, but his friend had not. The friend told Jamal that he had heard from their mutual female friend that the young man held a good job within a blue chip company as a IT consultant. Jamal, also an IT specialist, expressed considerable disgust at the attempted comparison between himself and the boyfriend. He replied: "yeah, maybe he's got a decent job, but he's got no class whatsoever. He's a cave man, a total TP. I mean, you should have seen the amount of gold jewellery he had on". The distinction Jamal drew on to differentiate between himself and the young man was not occupational, but one of class cultures; of particular cultural forms which contribute to the drawing of class boundaries between young people. Bourdieu's conception of class as operating around habitus<sup>4</sup> as well as capital, fits these examples of the construction of social class (see Brubaker 1985 for a full commentary). Attitudes, perception and lifestyles change not only across lines of culture, but that also along the axes of 'class', with the two intricately linked. These two axes, and their intersection, cut vast lines across the British Asian population, dividing and uniting.

## Summary

While notions of social class and identifications based on both occupation and cultural structures were commonly operationalised by the young British Asians in the study, this was

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<sup>4</sup> A class defined by habitus, is one where the members experience common conditions in everyday life, in schools, on the street, within the family as well as the workplace.

only in reference to other British Asians. Contrarily, there was little shared identification with white class counterparts, although there was identification by the young Bangali men with their black counterparts. As I have already suggested, class positions can be analysed not only in terms of their 'market' and 'work' relations, but also the 'status' situation. As Lockwood (1958:15) notes, what is of importance in the construction of class is '... the position of the individual in the hierarchy of prestige in the society at large' (see also Bechhofer et al 1976). Wright's (1989b) reworked notion of class as revolving around any antagonistic material interests based on exploitation, whereby all members of a given class share common material interests, is useful in this context. In the case of the participants in this study the strongest material interest is that of anti-racism, anti-discrimination and anti-misrepresentation. As such, the popular labelling practices, persistence of the view that immigrants are a problem, (neo)colonial narratives and discourses about British Asians, and, as I will argue in Chapter five, the lack of authority over their own narratives, informs us that South-Asians in general do not occupy a position of prestige in British society.

Writing of the relationship between gender, sexuality and class, Finch (1993) suggests that class groups are discursive, created not solely through economic ordering but through the use of 'moral' and cultural categories. Further, because class structures are reflected in and are a reflection of dominant British cultures and ideology (see Alt 1998, Rex 1998), the labelling of a physically distinguishable group, such as British Asians, with socio-cultural and personal characteristics that are constructed as different (and often inferior), affect the way subjects of this construction are incorporated into culturally informed class structures. As Layton-Henry (1990:44) notes: "Immigrants do not have to adapt to universally accepted norms and customs, but, rather, they are assigned a place in the non-egalitarian social order". As such, McAll (1990) draws our attention to a distinction between 'class' and 'status group', asserting that class is merely a classification, whereas a status group is a collectivity that self-consciously defines itself as such, and is seen by others as a group. The crystallisation and maintenance of this group can be around shared lifestyles, and the



boundaries of a status group may cut across class boundaries, as well as coinciding with them. This perspective informs us on several points. Firstly, we noted that it was only the younger British Asians from lower class strata that identified with others from other ethnic minorities on the basis of class. Class consciousness in this context was not the Marxian notion of production relations. The lack of identification with white working-class counterparts suggests this consciousness was the result of 'status' or lived experience. This was also the case for the middle-class participants, who articulated a lack of identification with their white counterparts, and for whom the importance of real or imagined ethnicity was dominant. Thus for the young participants in the study, constructions of 'class' are often apparent as based on occupational position and ideas of heritage and culture. However, as Aliya's and Divia's examples demonstrate, although the class frameworks in use had similar structures of meaning as they do in wider British society, identifications were restricted to those of similar racial backgrounds. The linkages of shared notions of ethnicity played a significant role in conceptions of social class, and thus class consciousness. This indicates that constructions of social class were based on subjective identification and lived experiences.

## **Gender**

### **Introduction**

This section will first review the development of feminist approaches to the analyses of gender issues, and how they may contribute to the study of ethnic identities. In the first section of this chapter, I argued that colour, through the ways in which it is constructed in British society, is perceived as a marker of an 'ethnic' identity. Following from this, I will argue here that the ways in which gender was constructed within the cultural frameworks of

young and older British Asians,<sup>5</sup> and the way this construction is perceived by British society, contribute significantly to identity formation, and has an impact on the use of gender as an ethnic resource. The issue of gender has long been accepted as socially constructed by cultural practices which change over time and space. Different ethnic groups and cultural groups have differing concepts of the gendered categories of man and woman, boy and girl, which become directive by laying down normative expectations of what males and females should be like. The question this section seeks to address is the relationship between gender and ethnicity.

One reason why the issue of ethnicity has often been left out of studies on gender is because feminism was originally based on a 'grand narrative' of female oppression (Cornwall and Lindisfarne 1995), without differentiating between different types of oppression and the different experiences of women (e.g. Katz and Monk 1993). The voice of the white, middle-class female was that which was the founder of feminist approaches and resultantly, the class and ethnic bias in feminist analyses (McDowell 1993). Black feminists have pointed out that white feminist have perpetuated the eurocentric way in which women from minority ethnic groups are seen (Parmar 1982, hooks 1984, Brah 1987); for example through the misrepresentation of black women's sexuality and family relations, and through the perpetuation of the idea of South-Asian women as subservient, acquiescent, and victims of their cultural locations (Bachu 1993). Black feminists have argued that stereotyping of this nature occurs not only in the media and in common-sense sensibilities but also in academic discourses (Anthias and Yuval-Davis 1992, Parmar 1988, see also Keith 1996). The problem, far from being intentional, was a result of the imperative of

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<sup>5</sup> I have already suggested that the study will view culture as constantly created, as something we 'do', rather than 'have'. However, throughout the study I have had to, for purpose of illustrating this very creativity, make a generational comparison, between the cultures of the young people and their cultures of their parents. This is not to imply that either are static or whole or confined to the two generations.

white feminists to crusade in 'liberating' their downtrodden sisters. As Cornwall and Lindisfarne (1995:142) note: "...the concern of white western feminists with 'liberating' their 'sisters' in Africa often involved imposing their values on situations they failed to understand". White feminists, some black feminists feel, have taken an unfruitful, if not misguided, approach.

Judith Butler (1992) and Floya Anthias (1998) argue that feminism has been predominantly marked by white female values because of the priority given to sexual difference over differences of ethnicity. Early attempts at including a 'racial' dimension to gender analysis fell short by simply 'adding' the racial aspect to that of gender, as a cumulative effect. What was ignored was the ways in which the two intersect, and the way in which the experiences of discrimination are altered (Maynard 1994, Collins 1990). Anthias and Yuval-Davis (1992:113) have urged for recognition of the importance of the crossing of gender and minority ethnicity axes: "Gender relations differ according to ethnicity. There exist culturally specific practices relating to mothering and sex roles and thus ethnic divisions are particularly important in the household". Sites of oppression and resistance may be different for different groups of women. hooks (1984) argued that that for some black women, the family can be a source of strength or resistance against oppression, whereas for white women it may be an element of their oppression (Oakley 1974, Finch 1983).

The gender divisions of the dominant ethnic group also affect ethnic minority women, that is, there are two sets of relations around gender that affect them (which is not the case for women of the dominant ethnic-majority) (Anthias 1992). Some commentators have expressed the opinion that ethnic difference cannot be overcome by gender similarities, and that white feminists should not take part in some discussions concerning ethnic groups, since their understanding could result in misinterpretations of problems and misguided in solutions. Thus, according to bell hooks (1984), feminism should be about the

movement to end all cultures of domination, all practices of inequality. This should extend to practices and cultures beyond those that apply only directly to women. In this section, therefore, issues concerning cultural expectations regarding males as well as females will be presented.

As noted above, much of the social sciences until recently had not analysed closely how gender processes relate to ethnicity. Women were seen as a monolithic group, and differences in terms of experience and modes of oppression were not acknowledged. Slowly this linkage is being explored, but as commentators have noted, there is still a tendency to treat the experiences of women from minority ethnic groups as homogenous (Bachu 1993, Afshar and Maynard 1994, Aziz 1994, Koshy 1994, Bhopal 1997). Furthermore, in analysing ethnicity, the gender aspect is often lacking (Maynard 1994). Other researchers merely add the cumulative effect of, for example, gender, class and ethnicity, rather than exploring the ways in which they intersect, reinforce or undercut each other (Brah and Minhas 1985, Ramazanoglu 1989, Anthias and Yuval-Davis 1992). Although racism and sexism are separated at the analytical level, at the level of everyday experiences, this is not the case; they are intertwined. This rule can be applied beyond gender relations to other socially constructed practices. Ethnic minorities face multiple informing structures (Brah and Minhas 1985). In some circumstances, this may not be of great significance, but in others there may be wide gaps between the social systems that minority ethnic groups interact in. The ways in which gender is constructed, I argue, is an example of a both real and perceived significant differences between the minority and majority cultures. In the following sections, I examine how gender and ethnicity intersected for the young people involved in this study, and the ways in which they reinforced or diminished one another. I will focus on the contribution to processes of identity formation made by constructions and perceptions of gender in the different spheres in which young people interact.

## **Women as a symbolic source of cultural reproduction**

Differing cultural conceptions of gender and the roles ascribed to them are arguably one of the main defining features of different societies. In terms of minority ethnic groups, Anthias and Yuval-Davis (1992:113-114) point out that the boundary of the ethnic is often dependent on gender and there is a reliance on gender attributes for specifying ethnic identity. They argue that much of minority ethnic culture is organised around rules relating to sexuality, marriage and the family. Hence boundaries between different cultures are often marked by the way women are socially constructed. Such markers (for example, expectations surrounding honour, purity, the mothering of patriots, reproducers of the nation, transmitters of ethnic culture) often symbolise the use of women as an ethnic resource, by the group as a whole.

Women in many communities are used as markers to differentiate between one social group and another. For example in the India of ten years ago, and also somewhat today, women from the higher castes did not go out to work. This was seen as a lowering of one's family status, with lower caste women frequently found being employed in manual labour. As such, changes in the roles and expectations of women can give clues to the evolution of a cultural group. Thus, in his study of identity changes in early British settlers to South Africa, Lester (1998) notes that with settlement, the role of women as 'boundary markers' of class identities changed dramatically in the face of cultural threats from other ethnic groups. Subsequent harmonisation of women's roles and expectations were indicative of the harmonised British identity created by the different settler groups that faced 'cultural insecurity' from the other groups in an area. In the same way, while women were used as boundary markers and for claims to piety in the Indian sub-continent, in this country they have become the last foothold of the rapidly transforming cultural system that South-Asian immigrants brought over with them (Mohammad 1999, Fenton 1999). In most South-Asian

cultural systems, *izzat* plays a strong role in the standing of a family and community.<sup>6</sup> The *izzat* of a family is held by the women and is determined by how they behave (see also Weiss 1994). Marcus and Fischer (1986:46) remind us that the conceptualisation and importance of the individual and self has different meanings in different cultures. They note that in the Islamic umma, "...the individual, while a physical entity, has no autonomous sociological status, and is conceived as an integral part of a larger unit" Pile and Thrift (1993a) also note that the boundaries between the self and social are created differently in different societies. In terms of the female participants of this study, whether Muslim or non-Muslim, this certainly seemed to be the case. For the young British Asian males in the investigation, it was easier to act outside accepted rules of behaviour without any detrimental views being attached to themselves or to their family. By contrast, Asian women's actions were seen as reflective of the moral state of a family, and of the imagined community as a whole (see also Bhopal 1997).

The gendered woman is often used as cultural resource to reproduce a group's identity. Neigar's mother provided a strong example of the differing expectations placed on men and women, exemplifying the way in which women in her community are seen as the cultural boundary markers. Her son had married an 'English girl', whom she had eventually, though reluctantly, accepted. However, she was not prepared to allow her daughter to marry outside her 'community': "it is different for a girl. I could not accept it, and no-one else would. It is different. Our girls don't do this kind of thing". Her use of the phrase 'our girls' is illustrative here. It implies that women are seen as belonging to the whole community, as a marker of the state of the community and its value system. This difference in gender expectations was most vividly brought out during interviews with parents. Questioning them about the kind of spouse they would like for their children, it became apparent that there were quite different

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<sup>6</sup> The word '*izzat*' literally translates to 'honour', but converse to the way in which this word in English has a masculine association, in Urdu and Hindi it has a very definite feminine association (see also Khanum 1992).

expectations for females than for males.<sup>7</sup> The expectations for a male spouse for their children were much broader in scope than for a female spouse. One parent, for example, replied that for his daughter he would be happy with a man who could provide for her, whereas for his son he would like a woman who was religious and family-oriented with high moral standards. Although it is likely that these differing expectations are based partly on the tradition of the wife living with her in-laws, it does point to highly differentiated constructions of gender, with the woman used to assess the general state of a family. As one of the mothers pointed out, when asked about a spouse for her son: "it's very important to look at the family ... If the mother is not good, then how can you expect her to have taught her children how to live properly". Again, in this comment it is clear that women are seen as the reproducers of the culture.

### **The social construction of gendered British-Asians**

Just as western social constructions of gender exist, the same is true for 'Asian' social constructions of male and female. Traditionally, in the Indian subcontinent *'hijras'*, often transvestites but sometimes transsexuals or eunuchs, exist who are socially accepted for fulfilling a particular religious and social function. However, except for these unusual anomalies the boundaries of male and female have been quite rigid and narrowly drawn in most first generation British-Asian cultures.

Contemporary commentary on gender issues within British Asian cultures have been lacking in a rigorous account of the way in which both genders have been constructed, with the emphasis on female gender issues (e.g. Ghuman 1999, Modood, Beishon and Virdee 1994). The traditional social expectations of masculinity are as rigid, in some ways, as they are for females, though due to the nature of social norms for females, these categories may

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<sup>7</sup> In interviews, parents were asked what characteristics they would find desirable in a spouse for their child. This question was seen to be both easier to ask and for the parents to answer than asking directly how they would like their own children to be.

be considered more restrictive in terms of lifestyle choices. The gendered categories of male and female are imbued not only with lifestyle expectations but also phenotypic and emotional characteristics. Interviews with parents found that the male, as exaggerated masculinity, is seen to be a strong, hardworking person. A strong emphasis is also put on career or educational success (parental interviews), but preferably within culturally prescribed disciplines/occupations. Other studies have shown that parental expectations for young Asian males are still heavily centred in disciplines such as law, accountancy, engineering, medicine and the natural sciences (see Karn 1997, also see Table 4.2).

As Table 4.2 shows, there is a distinct bias towards the sciences and medicine, and away from the arts, especially for young South-Asian men. This study found that the arts and humanities were seen as 'soft options' for those who cannot handle the sciences. The emphasis from the parents was found to be that not just on a lucrative career but on one within accepted high-status professions.

Artists, writers and musicians do not fare well with the older generation, no matter how wealthy or successful.

**Table 4.2 Subject of highest qualification, males and females in the UK 1991 (percentages of those qualified)**

	White		Black		Indian		Paki-stani		Bangla-deshi	
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
Education	6	23	3	9	1	7	1	8	-	6
Health & medicine	4.2	8	6.5	4.5	22	18	14	13	22	13
Nursing	2	24	3.5	37	2	14	-	7	-	6
Technology &	31	2	19	2	26	2	26	3	17	-



engineering										
Science	17	8	14.5	6	17	18	24	22	18	6
Social studies	30	20	41	32	28	30	32	33	35	25
General arts	10	16	12	10	3	10	4	15	8	44

Adapted from Mortmore et al (1997)

For example, Jimmy is a successful DJ who has promoted events in night-clubs for a living ever since he graduated from university. Despite his success and financial security, his parents maintain a pretence with friends and family that he is an engineer, as they consider his vocation to be highly undesirable. For Jimmy this is not so much because his parents think it is immoral to work in a night-club, but because, successful or not, this work does not hold high status in his parents' culture. In a similar vein, a few of the other young people, for example, Shahid who was studying Media studies at further education college, expressed the view that their parents were dissatisfied with their choice of studies.

The emphasis from the parents is on the male as bread winner, and many of young men complained that their parents compete with each other over their son's educational or career achievements. The emphasis on studying and gaining qualifications was not usually for the sake of education itself, but on account of the status it could bring. This was illustrated by Tunveer, who comes from a wealthy middle-class background. He suggested to his mother that he should continue his education by doing a masters degree. His mother disagreed, so Tunveer found employment at an investment bank. Although his mother has no idea what position he is employed in, she takes great pride in telling friends and relations that her son is working for this institution.

Contrary to the expectations for males, the situation for females was more varied between cultural groups and between social classes. However there were certain things in common. For females, morality, respect and obedience to the older generation, alongside

beauty, featured as high, or higher, on the list of expectations than education (parental interviews, see also Dwivedi 1996b). Other studies have noted that education, for the middle-classes and working-classes alike, is often viewed as part of a female's list of attributes that facilitate the search for a good spouse (Afshar 1994). 'Feminine' qualifications, such as fashion design and beauty therapy, are seen as suitable qualifications for women who are to marry (Mohammad 1999). Although many more young females are pursuing education in the sciences, as well as seeking long-term careers, this study found that those who pursue one of these options, or who study for 'too long', are seen as 'career' girls. This designation is associated with a view that they are head-strong and disobedient, and have sacrificed their family and future marriage for the sake of a career. This was even the case where one or both parents are higher educated (parental interviews, also see Ghuman 1999). In the case of the education of my two sisters and myself, comments from members of our extended family and friends have included "don't let them get too educated because it will be difficult to get them married". Marriage, rather than a career (and incompatible with a career), was in some cases still seen as the primary objective for young women. Thus, Neigar's father would not let her take a part time job to earn cash and to gain working experience. Neigar explained: "he thinks that if I have a job I can get up to all sorts without anyone knowing, and that it will be bad for my reputation. But if I don't have a job now, what am I going to do when I finish school or my A levels". This type of expectation is something that many of the young people said they were used to hearing repeatedly. I can recall very well the following conversation I had as an 18 year old with a Pakistani friend of my mother's (a mental health doctor in his late forties, whose wife works in a travel agency). It went something like this:

**MrX:** what will you be studying at university next year

**Me:** I'm not sure, I've applied for a few courses, geography and marine biology.

**Mr X:** Why geography and marine biology?! What would that lead to?

**Me:** I don't know, I'm just really interested in marine ecology and stuff.

**Mr X:** That's nice, but why don't you keep that as a hobby to do in your spare time. You should do something that will be useful for your future husband and your family. Mrs X

always does all my flight bookings for me and organises my hotel when I go away for conferences.

Again, the explicit expectation expressed here is the belief that my future partner would be the bread winner, and that my role would be family nurturer and carer.

In the parental interviews, the words 'strong' or 'strong willed' were often used as a positive attribute for young men, but for females, the word 'modern' or 'independent' had negative connotations. This finding was also echoed outside of the study. For example, on one episode of a weekly TV discussion show (Café 21, BBC2, 11 December 1999) featuring a small group of young British Asians, parents of the young attendees were invited along to talk with their children about the gap in understanding between young people and their parents. The parents expressed concerns for their female children's lifestyles, and two of the six parents present used the words 'too independent' to describe the reasons for their dislike of their daughters' lifestyles. Similar findings have been made in other studies (e.g. Anwar 1998, Mohammad 1999).

However what is not widely documented is that there can be a heavy emphasis on female education amongst the middle-classes and working-class families from certain backgrounds. This was demonstrated by parents in interviews. Aliya's mother told me about the support that her and her husband had given to Aliya:

I always wished that my father had encouraged me to stay on at university instead of getting married. I know that I could have been a very good barrister. I don't regret getting married, but I wish that I had waited until I had finished my education.... I know that Aliya would not be happy just looking after a husband and family. She has been brought up to understand the value of education.

Tina's mother however, related their support for her education back to marriage prospects: "Nowadays the young boys are not just asking how fair is the girl, can she cook, will she look after my mother, first they are asking how much money does she earn, what are her qualifications. Tina and Prabhita [Tina's older sister] have to compete with accountants and pharmacists".

These fairly rigid, gendered expectations have been formed by the expectation of their parents' generation. They have an impact on the life choices open to the young people. In some cases these types of views were held, not only by the older generation, but also by young people. Thus, Karim, a young Bangali male, commented on the differing treatment that his older sister received compared with him. He said that although he was willing to challenge some of the restrictions placed on her by their parents: "I wouldn't let her do it all the time [go to parties], especially if other people found out, like my uncles". When I asked if their parents knew that he frequently attended clubs and parties, he replied "yeah, but that's not a problem, I'm a man. It's girls who shouldn't be out late and partying. It doesn't look good". Others, however, noted that although they were aware of their parents' cultural views, they did not necessarily believe in them, nor adhere to them, when they could do otherwise. It is to this evolution of cultural forms amongst the young people that I now turn.

### **Gender in the 'new' cultural codes**

Within the cultural codes maintained by young people themselves, there has been an acceptance of a range of lifestyles, which may not be considered acceptable by older generations. However, within these new cultural codes, there are still gender differences in terms of norms and expectations. While some of the young Asian men reserve their right to choose their friends and girlfriends from outside 'racial' boundaries, often they do not extend this privilege to their female counterparts (see also Ballard 1994b, Ghuman 1994). Linked to this, 'policing' of young female Asians by young males was common. This applied even if the male and female shared no family or 'community' ties. In this sense, some of the young men saw their sisters as a 'burden', a 'responsibility', who have to be guarded for their own protection and for the protection of their communities. This difference in acceptance was apparent during the course of the study. Shazia, for example, pointed out that a few months earlier, she was confronted at home by her older brother who told her that she should get engaged so their parents could "stop worrying" about her future. Shazia felt that her brother upheld her parents' wishes, but often challenged them when they impinged on his lifestyle

choices. However, he would frequently try to coerce Shazia into complying with their parents' expectations of her.

Regardless of how young men choose to live, many take very seriously their culturally prescribed role as their sister's protector. These same men can apply very different expectations to themselves. In this, my findings echoed those of Chohan (1998:56):

Brothers like mine pride themselves on their roles as their sisters' protectors, without extending the same respect to girls and women everywhere. Their attitude to girls and women also grossly manifests itself in an unshakeable belief in female subservience and male superiority. These are the types who agree to arranged marriages because they will soon possess their very own Indian village girl attending to their every whim and desire.

The protector or policing role was performed not just by brothers or family friends and uncles, but also by unrelated males within the imagined ethnic community. On one occasion, with a group of young men from the youth club, including Mustafa and Malik, in their local area, we came across two Bangali girls who were also from the neighbourhood. It was a little before 5pm and the girls were in their school uniforms, probably on their way back home. We saw them walking out of the fast food restaurant we were going into. They were sharing a joke and laughing to themselves. One of the boys made a derogatory comment suggesting that the girls were sexually promiscuous, while another commented that "they shouldn't be out here roaming around like that". During fieldwork, young women regularly reported incidents of policing. Divia spoke of a friend of her younger brother as playing this role with her:

Kaz keeps comin' up to me in the common room and going 'does your brother know you smoke', and, 'you look like such a slag with a fag hanging out of your mouth'. He hasn't told him [the brother] yet, but I wouldn't put it past him.

A protective, authoritative attitude by young men was not found only amongst the those of working-class background, but those of middle-class background too. Thus Khulsoom experienced this type of policing. She said that one night at a club, when dancing with her

black boyfriend, she was approached by two British Asian men she did not know. They asked her if her family knew that she was seeing a black man, and if they knew that she frequented night-clubs. She said that when she walked away, they called her names and threatened to beat him up. This type of incident highlights the willingness of young men to resist the appropriation of alternative lifestyle choices by young females in the imagined ethnic community.

On the other hand, although less common, there were examples where the young men actively encouraged their sister's choice of lifestyle. Tariq, for instance, provided an alibi for his sister when she went on holiday with her friends, telling his parents that his sister had come to London to stay with him for a few days. His role in the affair was not just passive, but involved a considerable amount of fabrication to his parents. It was not just older youths who defended their sisters' lifestyle choices. One evening at the youth club, Karim reported to me and to the other boys present that he was 'stressed' because he had agreed to take his sister to the house party they were all going to that evening. With both parents in Bangladesh, he and his sister had told their aunt that their parents had agreed to a school trip to the theatre. For Karim it was a risk, since he was collaborating in an action he knew his parents would not like. In addition, it required considerable effort on his part because he would have to escort his sister home by 11pm. Despite this, he did not try to hide that he was aiding his sister, as he told this to a number of boys at the club who potentially could have disapproved. In general however, the fieldwork found that, for themselves, young men accepted some parental values and rejected others. The key point is that the line in defining non-acceptability of behaviour was drawn much earlier for young women than for themselves or for other young men. In part this was because the 'protector' role was encouraged, if not enforced, by the older generation. Neigar's brother, for example, was reprimanded as much by their parents as was Neigar when it came to their attention that she had been skipping classes at school. They felt that it was partly her brother's responsibility to make sure she behaved outside the home according to their wishes,

especially since they attended the same school. Thus, even some of the new cultural codes emerging amongst younger people were strongly influenced by their parents' cultural values.

The restriction on choice of friends was an issue raised by several young women involved in this study. When asked if he would be happy to learn that his sister was going out with a black or a white boy, Raj, a young Bangali male with a Turkish- Cypriot girl friend, replied: "first I'd go round and smash his head in, then I'd find out if he was a decent man or not". In the Asian community, the role of policing of a woman's chastity is taken on, not just by the parents, but by the whole 'community', particularly males. Older and younger brothers and their friends, act as the overseers of women chastity, and therefore as guardians of the faith and culture. Another issue that all the young women mentioned as having a distinct gendered bias was dating. Interviews with parents made clear that many felt that dating was only for the explicit purpose of finding a marriage partner. The dominant view was that all relationships should be non-sexual before marriage. However, there were notable differences in attitudes towards male children. Tunveer's parents knew he often spent the night at his girlfriend's house, but turned a blind eye. This type of tacit acceptance with male children's lifestyles, Ghuman (1999) suggests is quite common, especially amongst the middle-classes. Although just a few years ago it was taboo, now young British Asian men increasingly have pre-marital relationships openly (Ghuman 1999). Recently too, having white and black girl friends has become more acceptable (see also Stonehouse 2000). However, again, a gendered bias was present. For the female Asians in this study, their parents were not pleased if they had male friends, let alone boyfriends. All the Bangali girls, and several of the others, reported that their parents disapproved of male friends even telephoning them at home. The exception were the sisters Khulsoom, and Aliya whose parents had five female children, of whom Khulsoom and Aliya were the youngest, the oldest being 11 years older. Both had attended university away from home. They felt that their parents' experience of bringing up their older sisters, and the fact that they had both spent a considerable time away from home, had encouraged their parents to allow them a

greater degree of freedom. Moreover, professional qualifications (Aliya had an LLB and Bar exams and Khulsoom an undergraduate degree) appeased the parents, who felt these contributed towards a secure future, including a good marriage-match, so they did not worry about their life styles. Consequently, like some of the young daughters of their parents friends, both openly dated Muslim men. For the vast majority of the young women in the study, having a boyfriend from outside of the imagined ethnic community was frowned on by young people within the imagined ethnic community. As well as potential pressure from the white or black community, the Asian girl may well suffer at the hands of young British Asians. As Khulsoom explained:

I've been out with both, white and black guys. And the amount of hassle you get is unbelievable. It was different with both. With the white bloke everyone called me a bounty bar and that I'd disgraced my family and all that, but with the black bloke, although they still disapproved, and thought I was wild and having sex all over the place, they kinda respected it in way,[...] guess because a lot of them want to be black..

Although the study found that it was common for young men to have had white and black girlfriends, or to profess so, it was much less accepted for the females to have non-British Asian boyfriends. Many dated, but few when asked said they could or would marry outside their religion, not because of their own beliefs but because of the impact of such a decision on their parents. As Divia noted, parental reactions were important when deciding whether or not to marry outside of the imagined ethnic community:

There's no point, at the end of the day, they're gonna have such a hard time [her parents] what with all the differences. And there's loads of Hindu-Gujeratis, even just decent Hindus to choose from... I wouldn't want to do that to my parents. They would never get over it.

Marriage is one of the most important and effective ways in which ethnic boundaries are drawn and maintained (Modood et al 1994) and can therefore tell us much about a group's



identity. The gender difference in the acceptability of having non-British Asian partners or partners outside of the religion or regional group is illustrated in the Table 4.3.<sup>8</sup>

As Fenton (1999:57) notes, marriage is strongly related to cultural frameworks, and thus can indicate the relative positions of the genders within this framework. He notes that:

traditions of arranged marriage are a salutary index of this point. The collective concern of the wider family network in the making of a suitable marriage is directly contrasted to the individualism of the marriage ideology of choice and romantic love and is one indication of the way in which individualism in its widest connotations is seen as antaginsitic to the integrity of culture communities. In the social management of marriage, the cultural definition of gender relationships can be seen to stand at a critical point of conservation, adaptation and change among ethnic groups out of urban migration.

**Table 4.3 Inter-ethnic unions: married and co-habiting men and women, resident population Great Britain, 1991**

Indian	Male	Female	male %	Female %
Indian	1762	1762	91.1	94.6
Pakistani	18	6	0.9	0.3
Bangladeshi	0	4	0	0
White	134	71	6.9	3.8
Black	7	7	0.4	0.4
Chinese	5	2	0.3	0.1
n =	1935	1863		
Pakistani	Male	Female	male %	Female %
Pakistani	775	775	93.0	95.0

<sup>8</sup> Although some suggest (e.g. Coleman 1994, Barrington 1997) that the formation of inter-ethnic unions is an important indicator of 'the degree of assimilation or integration of an ethnic minority into a host society' the table is not presented as evidence for this argument. The differences in the table is used to show the impact of cultural constraints on the British-Asian female, compared to that of the male, on entering an inter-ethnic union.

Indian	6	18	0.7	2.2
Bangladeshi	0	1	0	0.1
White	42	10	5	1.2
Black	1	3	0.1	0.3
Chinese	0	0	0	0
n =	831	815		
Bangladeshi	Male	Female	male %	Female %
Bangladeshi	217	217	93.0	99.5
Indian	4	0	1.7	0
Pakistani	1	0	0.4	0
White	7	0	3.0	0
Black	2	0	0.9	0
Chinese	0	0	0	0
n=	233	218		

Adapted from Barrington (1997), source: 1991 census 1percent households

As such, the gender difference in mixed relationships shown in table 4.3, demonstrate again the significance of the woman's role in cultural reproduction amongst British Asians.

The young females in this study often expressed the view that they felt young Asian men, in particular within their own families, did not respect females as equals. Many of the young men who did have girlfriends from outside of the imagined ethnic community expressed quite ambivalent attitudes towards them. The majority of young men had had a non-Asian girlfriend at some time. These girlfriends would often be awarded what could be seen as 'token male status' (see Wardaugh 1991), in that they were permitted to enter places and groups Asian girls were not. At the same, they were often seen as 'loose', and morally corrupt. As an example of this ambivalent attitude, while talking at the youth club, four of five Bangali male present said that it was OK to have a white woman as a girlfriend, but not as a wife. The explanations for this ranged from parental values to personal expectations:

Mustafa: "I just couldn't do it to my family. My mum would be heart-broken if I brought home a ghoree [white girl]".

Raj: "It's not that my parents wouldn't accept it or anything, it's just that they're just not the sort you wanna marry. I can't see a white girls cooking rotli's for me!" [laughs]

Responses from males suggested that although they may not choose to marry someone outside their imagined community or religion, this would be for somewhat different reasons from the reasons young women gave. Parents, it seems, were much more likely to expect or demand endogamy of their female children than their male. This gender differentiated expectation was reflected in the young men's attitude towards young women within the imagined community.

The factors influencing young men and women's identity constructions are not only informed by the cultural values of their parent's imagined community and the way gender is constructed within these spheres. The ways gender is constructed within dominant British cultures, and the ways gender constructions of the British Asian population are perceived by these dominant cultures, also impact on the construction of young British Asian identities. It is this perception of gender constructions by the dominant that I will examine next.

### **Cultural misinterpretation**

Many commentators have noted that the choices for young British Asian women are thwarted by expectations of sections of both the Asian community and the white British community (Cross et al 1990, Brah 1992, 1994). Using the example of labour force participation, commentators have often pointed to obsequiousness, patriarchy and the 'family carer' role of the Asian woman as the reason for low rates of economic activity (Brah 1994, Lutz 1994). They have noted that in most British-Asian households, the man is still the main bread-winner, and the dominant cultural system dictates that a woman's career take second place to her husband's, and to her role as carer and reproducer (as seen in household

migration being more commonly determined by male than female job changes; e.g. Halfacree 1995). This may be true in part, but there are other possible reasons for this scenario; for example the predominance of 'home-working' amongst British Asian women (Bachu 1988). Yet part of the discriminatory practices that contribute to lower rates of economic activity do come from wider British society. Teachers, careers officers, personnel and training staff have all been implicated in the negative labelling of young Asian women, as suitable only for particular occupations (Cross et al 1990, Brah 1994). Popular perceptions of British Asian women as 'passive' have been disadvantageous in terms of securing a position in the labour market. Despite increasing qualifications, British Asian women still have not reached the highest rungs of the ladder, because they face not only sexism, but a racialised form of sexism (Phizacklea 1994).

Misunderstanding and stereotyping by the wider British community contributed to the identifications made by the young women participating in this study. Many mentioned that a 'crusading attitude' by white female friends had on a few occasions put them off talking about family issues, or making close friendships with white males and females, who often see these young women as suppressed and oppressed. Divia commented that when she first went to college and made a few white friends on her course, they would organise social events and go out in the evenings without including her. She thought they did not like her well enough to extend the friendship out of college. Later she found out they had not asked her to join them because they assumed her parents would not have permitted her to do so. As has been suggested of white feminists, there is a common perception that South-Asian women are oppressed, mainly because of the perception of them having little choice in their life styles (see Lawrence 1984). This misinterpretation of cultural differences is often translated into notions of passivity and oppression (Parmar 1982). What has been little documented is that young women are not passive receptors of their parents' culture (see also Keith 1996). Shazia, provided an example of a personal choice that coincided with her parents' cultural tradition. She planned to have an introduced marriage when she was ready:

It's not even that I don't mind, I actually want to [have an arranged marriage]... I'm just gonna leave it up to my parents and my aunties to look out for some nice boys to introduce me to. Let them do all the hard work of scouting around if they want to. It's just like meeting someone your friend knows or whatever, and getting to know them, except my parents do the getting to know them bit and tell me about him. If I like the sound of him, then I'll meet him. It's not like I'm gonna marry someone that I don't know ... no time wasters like my ex (referring to an ex-boyfriend) and I've told them as well. He has to be nice looking!

Shazia, although following the tradition of introduced marriages, had chosen to do so for very different reasons. Rather than entering into it for the sake of choosing a well-off family, or one with links to her own, or even through coercion by her parents, she wanted her parents to take the burden off her in finding suitable young men. What might initially look like passive adherence to parental cultural values, on closer examination can be understood as a personal choice that is *informed*, in part, by parental values. Another notable example from the study of cultural misinterpretation by wider British society involved the wearing of the 'hijab' by Muslim girls. This is often mistaken as a symbol of oppression. This contrasts with the views of Zainub, a 20 year old university student I met at the Islamic lectures attended by the young Bangali men. She had recently started wearing hijab, and felt that her white classmates often look at her as if they "pitied" her. She explained how she came to the decision to wear hijab:

With the hijab, I feel liberated. Because my sexuality has been down played by wearing this veil, when I walk out into society I'm being taken as a person, not as a sexual object.[...] It's white women who are oppressed, they just can't see it. Look at them, they think that they are liberated, even though they are constantly struggling to be the sexual creatures that men want them to. You tell me honestly, the woman who goes out and has a surgeon slice her up and insert a potentially dangerous foreign body under her skin to make her breasts bigger so that she feels more attractive, she isn't oppressed?

However, the choices of young British Asian women are often ill-understood by others. Another example of the patronising stance that is taken by some 'white' women to young British-Asians, came out in a conversation in a night-club. An Asian friend and I were in the toilets, talking, catching up on the week's events and waiting for a free cubicle. A white

female, slightly older than us, was also waiting. After a few moment of listening to us talking, she asked us if we were having a nice time. At first we did not understand what she meant, but then she carried on to say: "it really is nice to see Asian girls getting out of the house and going out and having a good time. Good on you". Whether the young woman was being sarcastic or sincere, she was nevertheless drawing on a prevailing stereotype of young British-Asian girls as house-bound, unable to partake with their friends in every day social activities.

As Bachu (1996, 1993) points out, cultural traits and traditions are often seen from the eyes of westerners as repressive, and as codes which are passively accepted. There is a failure to understand that young women often do not passively accept these values but they continuously adapt, choose to accept, reproduce, accommodate, modify, recreate and elaborate them, according to their own beliefs, and to their best advantage (see also Baykan 1990). This study found that the young women were involved in actively changing and challenging what they did not find acceptable for their chosen lifestyles. Examples of this included changing clothes and applying make-up on arrival at school or work, and skipping classes in order to visit shopping malls or boyfriends. Most of the young female British-Asians felt that they could live their chosen life by adopting different behaviour within the various social spheres they interacted in. This is not a cowardly option, nor one which suggests that they are 'trapped between two cultures', as has been suggested by some, but one which allows them to keep peace at home, and respect their parents' beliefs, while practising their own choices and slowly getting their parents and others used to these choices. With regard to this, Shazia explained why she takes her make-up off before she goes home:

... its not like I'm scared or anything. She'd [her mother] just shout at me and tell me to take it off. It's just a hassle, and it'll start her thinking about what else I get up to. But I do wear eyeliner and mascara around my mum now when she never let me before. She'll probably be OK with the lipstick as well, soon.

The identities and lifestyle choices of the young British Asians must be understood as informed by various factors, of which parental and wider imagined community values are just one. An important contribution to their identity constructions also comes from the perception of their lifestyle and choices by dominant British cultures which continue to see them as passive, or in the least, 'confused'.

### **Contradiction and confusion?**

With concern for documentation concerning 'confused' and 'trapped' young British-Asians (e.g. Ghumann 1999, Taylor and Hergarty 1985, Taylor 1976, see also Hutnik 1991), the investigation found that the young women spoke intelligibly about their lifestyle, identities and the range of lifestyle choices open to them. For instance, commenting on what may have been seen by others as a secretive double-life, Shazia said:

It's not really that it's so hard to try and be one person with your friends and another person at home. My mother said that she had the same problem with her parents and that was back in Pakistan years ago. I think all young people have to go through it, even English people. What is hard is that whatever you do, no-one seems to understand or accept. I just do what I want anyway, but without getting in trouble with my mum and dad.

What Shazia is saying echoes comments made by Brah and Minhas (1985), who contest the vision of an exclusive intra-generational conflict found among British Asians. As Shazia demonstrates, although she does not agree with some of the values of her parents, to some extent she does want to respect their wishes. Divia's sentiments (above section) on choosing a marriage partner within her parents' ethnic community echoes this compromise between parental expectations and a desire not to curtail life choices by much. For the young women, the accommodation of the different cultural spheres they interact in is difficult, but is more of a necessity than it is for the young men. Not only are there differences in the rules of social conduct for women between their parents' cultures and that of their peers, but they are

less able to shed 'signifiers' of their 'ethnicity'. Young British Asian men were found to be given more leeway in their lifestyle choices (except career choices). As one example, they are usually granted more mobility, as in visiting friends and going shopping. Furthermore, the lack of strong cultural rules on dress or appearance for males allows them to shed strong signifiers of perceived ethnicity. By contrast, the distinctive dress of the salwar kameez serves to distinguish young Asian women from their white peers (Chapter five, also Afshar 1994).

The greater demands placed on the young women, which necessitated working out strategies for accommodating differing demands and often different behaviour in different social spheres, also enabled them to work out how they felt about their positions both within the imagined community and within wider British society. Many of the young women said that they did not see themselves as 'Pakistani' or 'Indian'.<sup>9</sup> More commonly, the views expressed were similar to those of Khulsoom:

I don't really feel like I'm anything. Like, I'm not Pakistani, I mean, I don't wear Salwar kameez a lot. I really don't feel comfortable in it. I can't really speak Kutchi properly and other little things like that... I wouldn't say I'm English, not even British, because I'm not white...

These sentiments were consistent throughout the different social spaces that the young women entered into. Contrast this with the views of the young men who would at various times exclaim proudly that they were 'Pakistani' or 'Bengali', and at other times 'Asian' or 'British Asian' (see also Chapter five). It certainly seemed more problematical for women to locate their identities primarily as Muslim or Pakistani, for these categories are often the

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<sup>9</sup> This was however, dependent on how long the individual had spent in Britain, and the ties they had with family back in Asia. The Bangali girls, probably because of their (or their family's) comparatively short stay and stronger ties with Bangladesh, were more likely to see themselves as predominantly 'Bengali'.



sites of gendered restriction that these women do want to be constrained by. Dreissen (1997) notes similar feelings amongst French Algerian women, who feel that they have to reject being Algerian because the value-system endorses female oppression.

For the young women, conscious decisions about lifestyles, beliefs and self-image have been well thought-out. For the young men, the conflict between the demands of different communities is not as strong. They have not had to engage so actively in choosing lifestyles and working out strategies, and are therefore often more contradictory than women about their lifestyles and beliefs. For young men, contradictions in lifestyles resulted from ambivalent attitudes towards the different cultural spheres in which they live. For the young women differences in their behaviour within cultural spheres are a self-conscious strategy. This self-consciousness has been a result of compromise and resistance that leads to self-examination and decision making..

## **Summary**

There are differences in gendered cultural codes in operation for young British Asians. Amongst the middle-class families in the study, like Aliya and Khulsoom's, the range of life choices approved by parents are significantly greater than those open to young women from working-class backgrounds. The image of the downtrodden Asian female seems to be true if we look at some of the controlling rules and practices that are in operation in some British-Asian communities. However, not only is the situation changing, with parental views and culturally assigned roles changing, but the women themselves have been involved in negotiating their life choices. Certainly, resistance and negotiation by young women has played a part in the reconfiguration of the way genders are constructed within the new cultural codes of the younger imagined community. As we have seen, often what looks like submission on the part of young women is either a conscious life-choice or a tactic used to live how they wish without reprisals from home. Most of the young women did not express

any unmanageable pressure from cultural practices. On the whole, the young women felt they successfully manipulated their behaviour to accommodate others and their own choices. The new cultural codes emerging amongst the younger people themselves, although opening up the range of lifestyle choices available to both young men and women, are still gender differentiated. However, resistance by young women to unpalatable expectations by the younger imagined community has been far greater than that to parental values.

The way that gender is constructed within British Asian and other British cultures has had an impact on the identifications made by both the young female and male participants. But it is important to remember that constructions of gender are not fixed, but are dependent on the social relations of a particular space, thus identifications will also change from context to context. As such, the examples given in this section of the constructions of gender and their impact on identifications exemplify only the particular spaces accounted for, and thus identifications made are likely to be different in other spaces.

## **Religion**

### **Introduction**

Religion has been suggested to be one of the most important facets of identification, and, as shown by the increasing number of ethno-religious political clashes around the world, one of the main axes around which notions of difference are constructed (Parker 1998). In order to gain any depth of understanding of young British-Asian identities, one must understand the very important role that religion plays in some of their lives. This is the case even for those who are not particularly religiously inclined. Not only must the religious inclinations and linkages of the young British-Asians be examined, but also the relationships the religions have with the west. Although a range of different religions and sub-religions are

present in the British-Asian population, the study focuses on Islam, with only passing references to the other two main religions of Hinduism and Sikhism. The reasons for this focus are that the majority of the young people involved in the study were of a Muslim background, and because of the very particular, often contentious, nature of the relationship between Islam and the west (Bauman 1999). Muslims are the largest minority religious group in the UK, with adherents from many countries and regions including Arabia, Bangladesh, India, Malaysia, Pakistan and Turkey, as well as North and East Africa.

This study found that religion contributed to young British Asian identities in two main (inter-dependent) ways : 1) The perception of the religion by wider British society has negative repercussions for believers. 2) Rules and regulations governing behaviour and appearance may result in practitioners standing out as 'different' through their lack of participation in some practices prevalent amongst wider British society, or through their practising of religious rules that are not commonly found in non-Muslim British society.

These broad issues are not necessarily based on the teachings of Islam and the Quran itself, but on the perceptions of the practitioners and the global and localised Islamic communities, and on those of the west. The construction of Islam was found to be different amongst the individual young Muslims (Sunier 1995), and in the same way differs from individual to individual, and in social contexts, within non-Muslim western society. However, in the first section we will present an account of the ways in which Islam has commonly been presented by the western media, and how this construction, or perceived image of Islam by young Muslims lent itself to particular identifications. In the last section, I will examine how, through their own constructions, or that of their parents, the actual practices of Islam contributed to particular identifications by the young people.

## **Perceptions by British society**

Recent years have witnessed ethnic reassertion among many ethnic groups around the world, and in Europe in particular (Esman 1994). At the same time, in the UK, there has been an enormous increase in the number of young British-Asian Muslims 'born-again' to a brand of ideological Islam propagated on, amongst other places, university campuses and college common-rooms. This rise, in often highly politicised forms of Islam, has been linked to the breakdown of cultural barriers, as an effort to safeguard the cultural purity of the group. This in turn has been linked to the increasing amount of anti-Islamic propaganda and sentiments in the west (Werbner 1994).

Indeed, the representation of 'fundamentalist' Muslims by the west has been consistent and unyielding (Ahmed and Donnan 1994). Richard the Lion-Heart crusading against Salahudin the blood-thirsty Turk, the World Trade Centre bombing, the depiction of unscrupulous Islamic arms dealers in the media, the Rushdie Affair and the Gulf crisis are a few issues in which representations of Muslims and Islam have been particularly condemning. Muslims have been presented by the west as violent, immoral, and generally unpleasant. It has been suggested that after the end of the Cold War and the disappearance of the threat of communism, Islam was elevated to the status of public-enemy number one (Ahmed and Donnan 1994, Gross, McMurray and Swedenburg 1996). Furthermore, this imagined threat from Islam comes not only from the Islamic republics of Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, or even Iran, but from 'inside'; from minority Muslim populations in Europe. This 'enemy within' has placed questions regarding Muslim populations, and the future identity of Europe, high on the political and popular agenda (Morely and Robins 1993, Husband 1994).

The press and national governments have been quick to point out the supposed threat that western-Muslims pose to western democracy, culture, values and society in general. An example of this was the Oklahoma bombing in 1995, when President Clinton,

on international television, immediately attributed the incident to Islamic terrorists, without any kind of corroboratory evidence. The Gulf War, which could be interpreted as essentially a battle of control over resources and markets, was also turned by the western media into an example of the growing militarisation of Islam (Werbner 1994, Allievi 1997). The Rushdie Affair resulted in the spread of accusation of militantism from just the fundamentalists in Algeria, Afghanistan and Iran to the whole of the British Muslim population, making 'British' and 'Muslim' mutually exclusive categories (Vertovec and Peach 1997, Blom 1999).

Media representations of Muslims during these events and at other times have sought to illustrate the 'strangeness' of Islam. As Charles Husband (1994:95) notes of his hometown of Bradford: "... I have become used to seeing the town televisually constructed as 'alien' with selective shots of the only mosque with a typically 'oriental' golden dome, and of women with their faces veiled, in order to 'contextualise' an interview with a Muslim community leader". Much of the imagery used by the press and by television media has been disparaging, with pictures of religious symbols, such as a minaret tower or a group of Muslims in subjugation during prayers, interposed with images of arms, gunmen or war scenes, thus contributing to the construction of a relationship between Islam and terrorism. Islam has also been posed as unlike, even diametrically opposed to, western modes of thought. Islamic practices have been used to illustrate this difference; from 'oppression' of women, through polygamy and arranged marriages, to the way in which halal meat is slaughtered (Watt 1988). Marcus and Fischer (1986:88) suggest: "Few readers in the non Islamic world ... are ready for texts that invoke anything but the grossest discriminations within the cultural worlds of the Islamic fifth of the world's population". They suggest that the negative attitudes of much of the west to Islam and Muslims, both East and West, has been suggested as surpassing overt racism today. Modood (1997b) asserts that Hostile attitudes are held not only by the quality and tabloid press, but also by political commentators and social scientists But the prejudice is not so much over the values and beliefs held by Muslims, but over the 'fact' of Islam, in the same way that anti-Jewish

sentiments are not so much anti-Judaic, but anti-Semitic. Yet it is not for religious reasons that Muslims are seen so negatively. In fact it has been shown that committed Christians are less likely to have negative views about Muslims than are nominal Christians or agnostics (Modood 1997b).

This negative image of Islam can have a strong impact on those who practice Islam or those who call themselves Muslims. Pulcini (1995) has suggested that it is difficult to pledge allegiance to a group or a religion that has become a source of shame and guilt and frequent accusation, right or wrong, of terrorist acts. This point was confirmed by the young Muslims at various times during this study. For example, after an incident in which Islam had received bad press coverage, Tariq said:

Sometimes I'm ashamed to call myself a Muslim. I don't want to be associated with the lot that go around blowing people up ... What people don't realise is that there are lots of different types of Muslims. Just because one lot are bad, that doesn't mean the rest are.

One of the problems of identifying as a Muslim, is that the west have a distorted view of Islam and Muslims generally. For Zainub, responses by her white friends to her recent adoption of Islamic 'hijab' or headscarf brought this out.

Sometimes it can be really tough, because you are opening yourself up to be thought of as a fundamentalist or mad terrorist. Because none of my [white] friends have understood or accepted my decision, I just end up spending more of my time with other Muslim women who can see who I am underneath my hijab.

Zainub's experiences highlight the way an open declaration of allegiance to Islam can serve to alienate the believer from western society and push them further into the protection and support of the Islamic community (see also Sahgal and Yuval Davis 1992).

The young Muslims in this study were well aware of, and often voiced quite strong feelings about, negative discourses about Islam. Bilal, after being handed a leaflet on the

street warning of the horrors of halal slaughter methods, commented "It just seems that people are always slagging off Muslims, when they don't really know anything about it [Islam]". Zainub reiterated these views, indicating strong feelings about misconceptions surrounding Islam, which made her stronger in her defence of the religion. In the same way that Afrocentrism is seen as symptomatic of the growing disenchantment of black communities who are experiencing worsening socio-economic conditions and/or racism (Lamelle 1993, Chrisman 1997), evidence points to the adoption of Islam, partly as a counter hegemonic force; as an embracing alternative to a society that many young Muslims do not feel a part of (Alexander 1998, see also Werbner's 1994 interpretation of the support for Iraq by British Muslims during the Gulf War). For many young British-Muslims this embracing is also a way of regaining control of the image they portray, and also of deliberately rejecting displays of westernisation or hybridity. As such, they wish to deny that they have accepted, or that the west has had an impact on themselves (Lavie and Swedenburg 1996). In true Orwellian fashion, the imagery of Islam an enemy by the west could make it into a real enemy, as expressed in much of the more recent anti-western, anti-capitalist sentiments of new Islamic groups (Nielsen 1997). If "... being on the outside may strengthen feelings of collective identity" (Sibley 1998:120), the readoption of Islam can be seen as a retrograde defence manoeuvre (Pickles 1995). For the young people in this study who had chosen to define themselves primarily as Muslim, this has been a very self-conscious decision. The adoption of Islam by these younger Muslims was an overtly political gesture. The decision to identify as a Muslim was strongly guided by the strong counter-position that Islam occupies. As I will show in the next chapter in the section on recent developments in the Islamic community, the adoption of counter-positional ideologies or practices is often a reaction by marginalised groups against discrimination. For young Muslims, belonging to a world-wide group with strong political objectives empowered their identity more than trying to fight against discrimination merely as a Pakistani or a Bangladeshi. Karim's comments after one evening at Islamic lectures held by the group 'Khilafa', exemplified the reasons behind young men's identifications primarily as 'Muslim':

...I tell don't tell people no more I'm from Bangladesh. they just think you're a curry boy. But if I say- 'yeah, I'm a Musalman' [Muslim], they'd be scared of me, cos they know we can do anything.

For some of the revivalist Muslims in the study, and even for others that did not really practice, to call themselves 'Muslim' gave a much greater sense of empowerment than 'Pakistani' or 'Bangladeshi'. While all of these classifications, Pakistani, Bangali and Muslim, have negative connotations attached to them, that of 'Muslim' is linked to a world-wide community of considerable strength. For some, the empowering advantages in identifying as a Muslim outweigh the disadvantages of negative representations of Islam through the protection and support given by the Islamic community. Thus, the negative representation of Islam in the west does encourages some young Muslims to be cautious about identifying themselves as Muslim, yet for others this same process encourages them to seek empowerment and protection within the arms of the Islamic community.

### **The effects of religious directives governing behaviour**

Many of the young Muslims in this study demonstrated a great depth of knowledge about Islam. Their knowledge, they believed, was quite different to that of their parents' faith. Very often their parents would have learnt about religion in the home, from dogmatic, doctrinal anecdotes about the prophet and his sayings. The emphasis in Islamic teachings, until recently, has not been on understanding the religion, but on completing the Qur'an in Arabic and following the rules of the religion. Furthermore, within both South-Asian cultures and within forms of Islam present within South-Asia, the rules of the religion have become mixed up with the rules of the cultural system of the time (see Sunier 1995, Ali 1992). Whatever was culturally unacceptable also became condemned in the directives of religious leaders. Moreover, because many Muslims in South Asia were recent (some only three or four generation) converts to Islam, some cultural codes that were assimilated into South-Asian forms of Islam, were in fact Hindu traditions (Shaw 1994).



The Islamic education of the youngsters, however, has been quite different in most cases. All the 'revivalist' Muslims (except Karim), and some other young Muslims in the study, professed to read the Qur'an in English, with a English commentary. Reading the Qu'ran in a language which they understand, rather than Arabic, ensures younger Muslims have the opportunity to comprehend what they are reading and to make their own interpretations.<sup>10</sup> The major difference that has evolved is that their parents' generation is Muslim because their parents were brought up to be so, as this was an integral part of their cultural framework, by contrast, the younger generation are more inclined to call themselves Muslim after first defining what this means. This was especially the case for the young women, who, as we noted earlier, seem to be more actively engaged in working through the contradictions of their identities. Many of the young women, because the rules of social behaviour are tighter and because of the watchful presence of the community, have found it more difficult to break rules. For Muslim men, especially those who are not 'born-again', religious contradictions existed in their lifestyles, but remained unfronted in their minds. Excluding the revivalists, the young Muslim males in the study were more likely to 'pick and choose' the parts of the religion that suited them. For instance, in Pickles' (1995) study she found young men who went to the mosque weekly, but drank alcohol. This type of contradiction also existed in the lifestyles of some young Muslim men in this study. All except three of the male Muslim participants of this study (all revivalists) had some degree of contradiction between their lifestyles and Islamic beliefs. Tunveer, for example, told me that he did not eat anything that was not halal and did not drink alcohol. However, he had tried a variety of different drugs and since his early teenhood had had several (sexual) relationships with girls. When asked why it was all right to have sexual relationships before marriage, but not to consume alcohol, he replied that "...going out with girls is natural, drinking

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<sup>10</sup> According to Islam, the holy book must be read in its original language, Arabic. For many, reading in Arabic is not coupled with a comprehension of what is read. All the parents involved in the study were taught Arabic 'parrot-fashion', which is the way they encouraged their children to learn.

alcohol isn't". Others explained that they had never eaten non-halal food before, so it was not difficult to carry on doing so. Karim, when asked why he smoked marijuana but didn't drink, explained that:

...[my] parents are always going on about how drinking is haram and how bad it is and dirty and things and they tell me all the time .... they don't say nothing about puffing [smoking marijuana].

Although many Asian parents do not tell their children drugs are forbidden by Islamic law, in their disapproval of alcohol, drugs are implicitly included. For many youngsters who follow one religious law and not another, there is often a cultural aspect behind this choice. For the Bengali boys who smoke marijuana, but do not drink alcohol and only eat halal food, the choice of lifestyle is directed by cultural preferences of parents and peer groups as much as religious directives taught by parents. Thus, although they maybe separating religion from their parents' cultural values and traditions, this newly interpreted Islam has been created through their own cultural frameworks.

For those who have re-adopted Islam, the religious groups that operate around university and colleges, such as Khilafa and Hizb-ul-Ulama, are important in imparting knowledge about the political and economic implications of Islam. Discussion groups, question and answer sessions, and philosophical and political analyses are common features of the type of religious service made available by these groups. The spiritual aspect of Islam, especially that of Sufism, has become a popular alternative for many young Muslims who seek more than just the rules and regulations of their parents' religion. Consequently, through a greater understanding of their religion, young Muslims are more able to distinguish culture from religion (also see Knott and Khokher 1993). They can also articulate this to their parents, arguing that as long as they keep to their religion, they can belong to a different culture. Many have actively sought change in some religious directives, and certain religious-cultural practices have changed dramatically or disappeared altogether amongst the younger Muslims.

Certain commentators have noted that first generation Muslims are becoming less religiously inclined, especially amongst the lower middle-classes (Ahmed and Donan 1994). They suggest that alcohol drinking by the male head is increasingly common, as is a growing decline in mosque attendance. A greater emphasis on secular education, and a willingness to let children out late, and make friends outside the ethno-religious community has also been noted. Many, it is suggested, are adapting their religious and cultural institutions to cope with the changing times. These findings were not generally echoed in this study. Except for Aliya and Khulsoom's parents, none of the young people reported significant change in their parents' approach to religion or religious commitment. If they had been more lax in their religious commitment, they did not make this apparent to their children. Similarly, those youngsters who had secured privileges, said that they had done so through long-term negotiation and coercion, rather than an unprompted change in their parents' attitude. Thus Jamal explained of his father's change of attitude toward letting him stay out late with friends: "it was like a deal between me and my dad. He wouldn't say anything about me coming home late, if I went to the mosque with him on Fridays". For other parents, changes have been made because of altered circumstances. For example, a group of Muslim parents, including my mother, were worried about their children marrying outside of the community, and decided to organise specific youth events, like question and answer sessions, lectures on issues younger people are interested in, and social events, like dinners (some even include music and dancing), where young Muslims could get to know each other (see also Warriar, 1994). As one of the parents of the group interviewed explained:

... before we were saying [to the young people], no, don't go to parties, and even when they go to the mosque, it is all segregated. They don't get to meet other Khoja's [the ethno-religious community name] of their age. But when they go to college or work they meet outside people and get to know them and end up marrying them. So, this way at least they have chance to meet our own girls and boys, from our own community.

One of the results of this change in the way Islam is interpreted and practised has been the emergence of different kinds of relationships with other social groups. The older first generation used religion to help maintain a distinction between themselves and the outside, and to show their often more westernised children they are different (Shaw 1994). It was also used to resist assimilation by using Islam's 'moral superiority' to keep a distance between themselves and non-Muslim British society (Ahmed and Donnan 1994). The young Muslims, however, separating religion from culture, have enabled themselves to adapt religious rules to accommodate the British cultures many of them have been socialised into. For example, some of the younger Bangali girls who practised purdah, or covering of the head and body, did so with fashionable Italian scarves instead of dupattas or black hijabs, and with loose western-style trousers and tops instead of salwar kameez favoured by their parents. With regard to this adaptation of religion to their lifestyles, Mohammed explained the difference between his parents' and his approach to religious directives:

... my dad would be really angry if he knew that I went to parties or even to eat somewhere where people were drinking [alcohol]. But just because I go, that doesn't mean that I'm drinking too, I not doing anything wrong just being there. ... he just wouldn't understand because he doesn't go out. You can't go around avoiding places where people are drinking, otherwise you wouldn't be able to go anywhere. You have to adapt.

Although some of the Muslim parents were reported to have relaxed some rules in recent years, others are still 'non-negotiable'. Some of these enforced rules can serve to single the practitioners out, to differentiate them from the non-Muslim majority. For young women especially, many aspects of their lives may be effected by Islamic dictates.<sup>11</sup> Issues they mentioned as making them feel different to their non-Muslim peers included not being able to stay out late or at friends' houses, and not being permitted to eat at friends' houses in case

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<sup>11</sup> Baumann (1999) suggests that when referring to religious practices, we should be careful not to confuse them with cultural practices. Although the values that are outlined here may well be cultural rather than strictly religious, I have referred to them as 'religious', as this was the way they articulated by parents to the youngsters, and interpreted by the non-Muslims.

of breaking religious laws. This was true not only for young Muslim women, but also for one of the young Hindu women in the study, who said that when she was younger, her parents did not allow her to have dinner at her friend's place in case she accidentally, or knowingly, ate some meat. Other common issues for female Muslims included modesty in dress, exclusion from physical activities like swimming, physical education, exemption from taking part in Christian worship, the observance of religious dictates such as eating halal food and praying at the appointed times. They found that these differences were often judged by the British majority as derogatory differences, with practitioners and practices seen as 'backward', 'strange', 'traditional', 'uncivilised', and very often as people to be pitied. Comments like that made by a white classmate to Neigar, on a school trip, "oh, no, you poor thing, you can't even eat MacDonalds!", serves to alienate young Muslims from their non-Muslim peers. For some of the practising Muslims, the visible markers which generate negative ideas amongst non-Muslims make it more difficult to remain anonymous. They constantly have to exhibit their beliefs visually, to declare openly that they are 'outsiders'. This is illustrated by Zainub's account of how wearing hijab has affected her life:

If you are wearing Hijab, that's all that they can see. Most people don't even bother coming up to talk to you. It's like they think that if you wear hijab, then you're not normal, and you're not going to do normal things, like watch films or go out to dinner like everyone else .... so I just tell myself that I don't need them if they are so ignorant and narrow minded.

It is not only the constraints that religious dictates place on the lives of young Muslim, but also the way these symbols of Islam are perceived by the non-Muslims. The young informants in this study found perceptions of Islam in the non-Muslim world to be that of a backward, violent religion, so adherents are viewed in the same way. Aware of this perception, some younger Muslims, like Zainub, have chosen to move further into the arms of the Islamic community, to avoid the rejection and misinterpretation of their lifestyles.

But it is not just discrimination against Islam that can create exclusionary practices, for discrimination was also found to run in the other direction, from Muslims to non-

Muslims. As with many major world religions, commitment to one ideology can contribute to exclusionary beliefs and practices. Although Islam endorses the divinity of Christianity and Judaism, this study found that practitioners often held derogatory views towards non-Muslims. The tone was captured in comments in one interview with a parent of a participant in this study, the father said: "These white people, they've taken things too far, because they don't have Islam. You know that after all this that they are concerned about, wearing short dresses and having boyfriends, when they die, they will see what it really is about, but then it will be too late". The nature of Islam, the way in which it relates to the meaning and organisation of social life, means that it is not a religion that can be practised solely in the mosque or at home. As Husband (1994) notes, social and political issues cannot be separated from the way that Islamic is practised. Indeed, one of the questions that was frequently debated at the Islamic talks attended by the young Bangali Muslims was whether a Muslim could practise his religion in a country without Islamic laws. Bilal was obviously influenced by this line of thinking. During a conversation in which I had asked him if wanted to return to live in Bangladesh, he replied:

I can't live here with all these Kaffirs<sup>12</sup>, when I know what they're doing is wrong. It might rub-off on me ... Its my duty to make people see the truth and become Muslims, but its too difficult with these people ... when they see you walking down the street with your topi on going to namaaz,<sup>13</sup> they just think you're backward.

Even though Bilal's comments are imbued with belief in his faith being 'right' and that non-believers being 'wrong', at the same time his last sentence sends out the message he is affected by the negative image that 'these people', or non-believers, have of him and of Islam. Prejudices are held by Muslim and non-Muslim British people alike. Both contribute to the politics of interaction between Muslims and non-Muslims.

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<sup>12</sup> The Arabic word for non-believers

<sup>13</sup> A topi is a special hat worn during *namaaz*, or prayers.

## Summary

The Islam of recent years in Britain has changed dramatically in comparison to the Islam that was practised by first generation British Asian immigrants, aided by the newer politicised sects that have emerged. As a result, many young Muslims have found ways of adapting their beliefs to fit their lifestyles and new cultural values. Yet the politicised Islam they support is often pitched with an explicit anti-western sentiment.

Although the understanding of different South-Asian religious groups in Britain has increased, there is still a lot of ignorance and prejudice, directed at Muslims in particular. On the whole they are tolerated and they tolerate, but in times of stress, such as the Gulf War, Britain seems to become especially conscious of this 'enemy within'. The Rushdie Affair has made not just young Muslims, but many minority groups, acutely aware of their precarious position in mainstream British society; that they are accepted so long as they play the rules, hide their differences and take their religion home. The Rushdie Affair made British Muslims visible, as a group who were a perceived threat to British values. In addition to the negative image of Islam, some religious dictates have had the effect of excluding the practitioner from aspects of the everyday lives of their non-Muslim peers. The effect negative representations and religious dictates have, is that practitioners create particular relationships with members of British and global society.

Taking these factors into account, the re-adoption of a politicised Islam by the young Muslims in this study should be seen as an expression of ethnicity. As Baumann (1999) points out, religion is not a divine fact, but a constructed, shifting context for action. We can see from the importance of political ideology rather than the 'rules' of the religion that many of the young men and women identified with 'religion' as a position from which to contest a particular type of social relation that was 'anti-other'.

## Conclusion

In this chapter we have looked at what might be considered the main axes of difference that may contribute to the construction of particular ethnicities. These axes may be significant because of the particular ways they are constructed within the different cultural arena in which young British Asians interact. They represent what are often considered to be the greatest differences between young British Asians and other groups in British society. Hence, they are frequently drawn on in the construction of identities. As Miles and Torres (1996:41) point out, this type of ethnic resource is created through a complex interaction between ascription by others and self-ascription. Speaking of skin colour, they suggest how ethnic groupings along this potential resource might occur, by noting that: "When human practices include and exclude people in the light of the signification of skin colour, collective identities are produced and social inequalities are structured". This could equally be applied to any of the socially constructed categories I have reviewed above. I have tried to demonstrate the way in which, precisely because they are attributed by those both inside and outside the grouping as being an 'ethnic' resource, collective groupings around that perceived resource occur. Referring back to Jenkins' (1997) point that a belief in common origins does not cause the formation of a collective grouping, but rather that through collective interests, commonalities are drawn on and a collective grouping arises, we can see that collectivities formed by the young British Asians constituted 'an interest group'. These interest groups were defined in part by the discrimination and stereotyping from outside. This was especially the case with constructions of difference based on colour and religion.

In this chapter I have tried to highlight the different discourses around those axes of difference, and how they are not fixed or accepted but contested, as people are political actors who produce, mediate, contest and experience the outcomes of racial and ethnic distinctions (Amit-Talai and Knowles 1996:14). In the next chapter, I will expand on this and illustrate how these potential 'ethnic' resources, and others, are mobilised and



operationalised by the young British Asians and other groups in their interactions. Further, I will argue that these resources are utilised differently in different social spaces, depending on the networks of social relations and the politics of difference that are constitutive of those spaces. Further I will argue that the identifications and ethnicities created by the young people did not draw only on these constructed differences, but created linkages with a wide variety of social groups

## Chapter Five

### The Construction and Flexibility of Ethnic Boundaries

#### Introduction

As noted in Chapter two, identity has been described as based on difference (Mouffe 1994, Brah 1996). 'Difference', however, is the result of sorting and categorisation by different social groups. It is both spatially and temporally related. As such, it is *constructed difference* that forms the basis of identification. I looked at a number of axes of difference in the previous chapter which, through the ways they are constructed in different cultural spheres, may contribute to the formation of ethnicities. In this chapter I examine the way identity, a relational construct, is mediated by the ways these and other potential ethnic resources are constructed. The sites of these constructions, or social spaces, are the socio-spatial contexts of interaction. I examine how individuals may negotiate different social spaces in order to interact with others, reformulating their identifications on the basis of the politics of the social relations of these spaces. This negotiation of social spaces, though performed to some extent by all individuals, seems to be an especially important aspect of young British (Asian) identities. This is perceived to be so because of a great difference between their parents' culture and dominant white British cultures (Ahuja 1997, also Jones 1993, Ghuman 1999). In addition, if we accept descriptions of identity processes used by psychologists, that of a functional life-script strategically deployed to negotiate social life (e.g. Erikson 1950, 1968, Head 1997), one could argue that many young British Asians, through the variety of cultural influences on the creation of their life-scripts, have a wide range of resources at their disposal. Consequently, they should be able to interact in a wide variety of social spaces with relative ease, and formulate a broad range of identifications.

Thus this chapter explores identity formation processes in some of the most important social spaces in which young British (Asians) live and interact. It examines the ways identification and ethnicity are context dependent. In addition, with concern for the homogenisation of South-Asian identities in much of the immigration and cultural studies literature, I present a range of identifications made by the young British Asians within these social spaces, drawing out both commonalities and differences across the group. In doing so, this chapter does not aim to be a definitive guide to young British Asian identities, but highlights the diversity of identities that exist, and may exist within the wider British Asian population.

The first section of this chapter, that of the space of the family, presents an account of the different cultural demands and influences arising from parents and other older family members. I examine the way the identities of young people are constructed within the spaces of the family. The second section focuses on spaces created by the ethnic community. Here, I offer evidence pointing to the declining importance of links between young people and other groups or communities based on regional (or national) origins. Instead, identification within ethnic communities favours linkages based on religion and sub-cultural lifestyle choices. Examining the local community and neighbourhoods where these young people interact, the third section examines the extent to which young British (Asian) identities may be embedded in local places, and the ways they relate to other social groups in their local (residential) spaces. In this section I suggest that while particular influences may have a strong impact on the place-bound allegiances of the young people, 'a sense of place', as in notions of belonging, may be constructed differently, depending upon the politics of the space of interaction. The fourth section then explores the identity construction of young people within the structures of school and work environments, alongside the discourses that operate in these spaces. The final section investigates discourses at wider national and global levels that impact on young British (Asian) identity constructions.

The chapter may echo or refute common findings of many other studies, but the difference is that this study aims to analyse the variety of influences acting upon the social groups, in relation to their role in identification. Through the ethnographic material gathered, the chapter highlights both influences that inform the identifications of the young British Asians and draws out processes of identity formation in action, arguing that the use of 'ethnic' resources in identity construction and the expression of ethnicity is dependent on social context.

### **The Space of the Family**

The social space of the family is an important contributor to the identifications of its members, and is itself an important space within which identifications are made. Within the space of the family, an individual starts life and (usually) lives securely, with limited outside contact for a number of years. It is in this space that young people first formulate a conception of self and of others (Dwivedi 1996b). It is within this space that people first configure an ethnic identity (Modood et al 1994). The British Asian family is different from its white counterpart not just in terms of size, but also its composition.

**Table 5.1 Average size of UK household unit, 1991 (number of persons)**

<b>White</b>	<b>Bangladeshi</b>	<b>Pakistani</b>	<b>Indian</b>
2.4	5.3	4.8	3.8

**Table 5.2 pensioner-only households, as a percentage of total UK households, 1991**

<b>White</b>	<b>Bangladeshi</b>	<b>Pakistani</b>	<b>Indian</b>
25.7	1.0	1.4	3.6

Source: UK Census 1991, Local Base Statistics.

As the figures in Table 5.1 show, the average British Asian family is larger than its white counterpart. The presence of three generations within the family household is also common (Ballard 1997); one indication of which is the rarity of pensioner-only households amongst the British Asian population (Table 5.2). The prolonged presence of an older generation within the family sphere impacts on family dynamics, and on the identifications made by its younger members. The manner in which these compositional factors impact on young people's identity constitutes one aspect of the first section of this chapter, which explores the internal dynamics of British (Asian) families. The principal aim of this section is to highlight the cultural influences that may contribute to the identifications made by its younger members within the family space, from both inside and outside the home environment.

An important phenomenon noted by commentators on South-Asians in the UK is that of 'the frozen clock', whereby émigrés have tried to maintain the cultural traditions present in their country of origin at the time they left (e.g. Pickles 1995, Ghuman 1999). Through this translation of cultural codes from the 'home' culture to the host country, the cultural framework is said to become reified and fossilised. This stress-adaptation mechanism is conceptualised by commentators as a response by immigrants to a new living environment that is seen as threatening and morally redundant (Ahmed and Donnan 1994). Following this path, many first generation immigrants choose to take part in 'outside' British society only in a superficial way; for example through limited contact in work environments. By contrast, many of the younger generation have had, through school and their local areas amongst other locales, a more sustained interaction with spaces outside the home. As Ballard (1994a:30) notes of young British Asians: "... in contrast to their parents they are constantly on the move between a wide variety of social arenas, which are often organised around differing, and sometimes radically contradictory, moral and cultural conventions".

This limited outside contact did emerge during the study, as one reason why older members of British Asian families tend to be more conservative in outlook in comparison to second and third generation British Asians. It was found that the parents' perception of the outside world and other social groups was often based on limited personal experience (parental interviews, see also Modood, Beishon and Virdee 1994, Valley and Brown 1995a.). Significantly in this regard, interviews with parents found that images of other social groups held by older British Asians were often gleaned from the media and other secondary sources of information, such as anecdotal stories shared between families. The young people's parents had much less contact with spaces outside the home or their immediate work environment, than the young people. For instance, interviews with parents found, as other commentators have noted (e.g. Dwivedi 1996), that many viewed the unfamiliar world outside the family home as a morally and physically 'dangerous' place. These sentiments are captured in Shamista's comments on her mother being frightened by a group of 12 and 13 year old white teenagers.

... she always walks to the next bus-stop after she's done the shopping, just cos they're smoking and having a laugh at the one outside the shops [the bus stop]. I tell her that they're alright, they're just kids from my old school, but she's still scared of 'em.

Lack of experience undoubtedly produces a distorted understanding of events. This dissonance between the understandings and preferences of older and younger members of the family can lead to the older members trying to act as a shield between its younger members and the outside world. But, as some commentators have reported, young British Asians often do not adhere to this 'internal/external' cultural distinction, instead residing comfortably within both: "Young British Asians may indeed be just as much at home in their parents' world as they are among their white peers..." (Ballard 1994a:34). Throughout the period of this study, in most of the social spaces encountered, young people showed themselves to be adept at handling quite different social environments. For most, the world outside the family home was a familiar, even likeable, place (see also Valley and Brown 1995b). Part of the 'problem' for parents comes from this contact and familiarity of the young people with the world outside the family home. But as

well as concerns over safety, many restrictions placed on the behaviour and mobility of young people were considered necessary by parents due to wider fears of disgrace within the cultural community. Parents generally had a clear set of ideas about how 'Asian' children should be and behave. Interviews with the parents highlighted that most would have liked their children to 'fit' or 'join in' more with activities within the parents' ethnic community. As noted by other commentators, it is still the case that whole families can be judged on the basis of the behaviour, failures and successes of one particular family member (e.g. Dwivedi 1996a). This has been a strong motivation for parents to place restrictions on their children. The case of Neigar is illustrative. Her behaviour, particularly her mobility, was especially well monitored by her parents, on account of the actions of one of her older brothers, who the community referred to as 'the one who ran away with the white woman'. This was a source of shame for her parents, who in response to what they believed was a disapproving reaction from the rest of the community, enforced heavier restrictions on their other children. This was done not only in an effort to make sure a similar thing did not happen again, but also because her parents saw this as a necessary step to salvage the family's reputation. The importance of a good standing in the ethnic community was often cited by young people as the motivation behind restrictive decrees made by parents. Similarly, most parents, especially those of Bangali origin, made clear, both in interviews and through discussions during participant observation, that the links to and support given by their ethnic community were important to them.

Significantly, a phenomenon that was consistent with all the young people participating in this study, was that the expectations of certain members of their family were often at odds with the demands of the social groups the young people engaged with outside the home. Aside from religious dictates, a host of cultural preferences, plus moral and safety concerns, informed head of household decisions on what types of behaviour were acceptable within and outside of the family home. There were certain issues of contention between young people and their parents that, to some extent, were felt consistently by the participants. These highlight the

greatest contradictions in expectations between the family and social groups outside the home. These issues included going out late, having boy/girlfriends, being allowed to have people stay over and being able to stay over at a friend's house. Also important for a number of young people, as suggested in the previous chapter, was the way demands from the family affected their choice of friends and their peer group. Many young women in particular argued that their social interactions and lives would be different if parental restrictions were removed or if they were a little more lax. For young people, negotiation with parents over such issues were ongoing. Small 'victories' were won, but often through compromising their identity in front of their parents. Neigar gave a good example of how she subtly compromises at home in order secure permission to go shopping with her friends:

Sometimes when I go out shopping with my mum ... even at home, I wear what I want, like jeans and a jumper, but I knew that if I was wearing my English clothes when I asked her if I could go [to the shopping centre] with my friends, she'd say no. So I put my salwar kameez and even my dupatta, just round my neck.

There's no need to go OTT [over the top], otherwise she'll know, and when I asked her, she said yes.

But the compromises made within the British Asian household can cut across more than one generation. Most Asian households hold strong ties to members of their extended family (Ballard 1994a). The presence of older family relatives, such as grandparents or great-aunts living or even visiting, can have the effect of limiting cultural change within the family unit. Sometimes the expectations of members of the extended family, especially grandparents, were found to be quite different from those of parents. In the British Asian families investigated here, it was still the case that, however different the ideas of the older people, they were considered 'wise', and their opinions and values were given utmost respect (see also Dwivedi 1996a). Many of the young people involved in the study had experienced situations where their parents had changed their more liberal attitudes because of pressure from members of the extended family. As one illustration, when their grandmother came to live with the family, Khulsoom and Aliya had to install a private phone line in their bedroom, as their grandmother disapproved of the fact they had male friends who called them frequently, even though their parents had no



objection to this. Young people in this study reported numerous similar experiences, which involved mainly grandparents, but in some cases extended to uncles, aunts and older male cousins. I have experienced similar situations. For example, when my grandmother came to stay with my family in London, I was working in a department store as a sales assistant. She was upset at the length of the skirt that was part of the work uniform I had to wear. Although my mother had no problem with this herself, for the six months my grandmother stayed, my mother asked me to go to my bedroom and change my skirt before my grandmother saw me.

As well as the influence of older members, the conservative impact on the family unit also comes from elders outside the family, especially from within the 'ethnic' community. This imagined community can play a key role in the maintenance of cultural codes of behaviour. It is this, the influence of and the links to the ethnic community, which I now turn to.

## **The Ethnic Community: At Home and Abroad**

### **The myth of return**

For numerous commentators, an important element in the identifications of British Asians is 'the myth of return', whereby immigrants wish to return to their country of origin after they have achieved whatever they first migrated for, for example secure finances or education (Anwar 1979, Summerfield 1993, Shaw 1994). Commentators have recorded that first generation immigrants generally maintain frequent contact with their homeland and kin through letters, and increasingly, due to falling costs and increased ease, by phone calls and trips 'home'. Young British Asians are commonly involved in such exchanges, such as accompanying their parents on trips 'home'. Such interactions provide an instructive context in which to gauge where young people feel their home is and which cultures they most feel part of. Yet this relationship does

not exist on its own, but is impacted on by the relationship parents have with a South-Asian 'homeland'.

Attitudes toward returning to live in South-Asia were quite diverse amongst the young people's parents interviewed in this study. Some, in particular the Bangali parents, made frequent trips back to Bangladesh, often for extended periods of time. Thus, two of my informants reported living with only one parent at a time as one or other parent was always in Bangladesh. Others said that one parent, usually the father, would return to Bangladesh frequently to attend to 'family business' or to the family land-holding in Bangladesh. Although a number of the parents made regular trips back to their 'homeland', a small minority suggested they would not return there to live permanently. This was the case with Divia's parents, who had migrated first from India to Tanzania and then to the UK. Her mother had not been back to India, her place of birth, in over 25 years. Another mentioned that her feelings toward returning home were ambivalent. She believed her children would be better brought up in South-Asia than in the UK, in terms of having an 'Asian' identity and value system, such as a strong commitment to family. However, she suggested there would be difficulties in living and bringing up children in Pakistan, such as the expense and availability of a good education, alongside an unstable political situation. This coincides with Shaw's (1994) findings that the older generation views the 'homeland' as the provider of their culture, with parents keen to impart this 'authentic culture' to their children. Summerfield (1993) also found that parents feared the potential effect of bringing up their children outside South-Asia, and sought to counter potential 'threats' by looking for spouses for their children from Bangladesh. As such, parents were seeking substitute linkages 'back home', when they were unlikely to return there themselves. This theme was certainly borne out in the study. Thus, with those parents who maintained that they might one-day return to live in their country of origin, few of their children believed this would actually occur. It was as if parents kept up a pretence to reiterate to their children their South-Asian origins. The inconsistency in parental views is readily recognised by

their children. This is illustrated in Shazia's recollection of her parents' reaction to their last trip to Pakistan:

... they're always going on about how they wish they had stayed in Pakistan ... that we wouldn't have turned out like we have. But when we went back to Pakistan last year, we heard about one of my cousins who was an alcoholic, and how my uncle's daughters just spend all his money on clothes and jewellery and won't get married, and then they see what a dump it really is ... I know they're happy that they made the right decision, but they'll never say so.

Recently, commentators have suggested that the dominant view amongst first generation immigrants on returning to their homeland has changed (Shaw 1994, Srinivasan 1995). They mention that many first generation immigrants have concluded they will stay in the UK. What some fail to mention is the role relations with 'the homeland' play in this decision. As with my own mother, who feels that she could not go back to live in India, many of the older, 'exiled' generation have a sense of territorially not belonging. Often they conceive of their homeland as their 'home place', as if it is still the place they left, although physically and socially it has changed (as they have). In reality, all that is left of 'home' are symbols; like the village water pump, or the house they used to play in as children. The *emotionality* of home, the personal connection to it, has all too often disappeared.

As for the young people in the study, trips 'back home' induced quite different reactions to the reported 'sojourner attitude' of first generation Asians. Although many parents reported that they enjoyed visits back to their country of origin, sometimes engaging in extended visits of months, it was common that their children did not always accompany them, especially as the young people grew older. However, a wide range of differences existed within the group studied. Although most Bangali youngsters had been to Bangladesh in the last three years, this was not the case for the Pakistani and Indian youngsters. Three of the Pakistani and one Indian youngster had not been back to Pakistan or India in over 10 years, while one Pakistani and one Indian youngster had never visited Pakistan or India at all. All except two of the seven Bangali

youngsters said that although they might enjoy a visit to their/parents' country of origin, they could not live there.

This pattern is similar to that found in other studies (e.g. Lyon 1997), but what is the rationale for these young people's attitude? Malik offers an appropriate case to explore, for at the youth club, in conversations the boys had about their country of origin, he, along with other boys, regularly referred to Pakistan as 'back home'. When asked about this, he said that when he was with his family or other British Asians, he frequently used the phrase 'back home'. When asked whether he considered Pakistan to be his 'home', he made clear he did not. He added:

It's just what you say [referring to the phrase 'back home'], cos that's how everyone says it. It's like saying 'back in the days', 'like things used to be'. It's like when you're talking about things that you don't like, you always go, 'it's not like that back home'... It's like where your parents came from. When they're talking about it, you think, yeah, that's where I came from, that's where I'm at.

Malik's comments highlight the importance of context in identification processes. He states at the youth club that he does not really think of Pakistan as home, and would not like to live there, but when in the space of his family, Pakistan 'as home' takes on significant meaning. Another young man, Asif, gave another reason why he referred to Bangladesh as 'back home,' even though he had not returned for a visit since his arrival in the UK at the age of six, and did not wish to return there to live there:

If you say like 'this is where I live, I'm living in England', they think that you think that you're a 'ghora' [white person]. So that's why you always say 'back home' in front of people, like my dad and uncle and other people, so they don't think that you've forgotten where you've come from.

Asif's comments highlight the politics of identification. At home, he maintains Bangladesh as 'home' to his family and their community, in order to show that he is not too 'westernised'. Contrast this with comments made by Asif regarding his father's disapproval of his seeking employment outside of the family restaurant; "I wish he'd stop going on about how they do things in Bangladesh. I don't care what goes on in Bangladesh, we don't live there no more". Asif's comments

make clear that the meanings ascribed to 'back home' are dependent on the nature of the particular social relations present. This suggests identification, rather than identity, is a suitable term for capturing the provisional and positional nature of the politics of interaction.

Although some of the other young people in the study used expressions like 'home' or 'back home', when referring to Pakistan, Bangladesh or India, most had come to the conclusion it was not their homeland. In some cases, the experience of their parents' country or origin had been very different from the welcoming idyll their parents had led them to imagine. Furthermore, they felt they were 'foreigners' 'back home', as they did not believe they were seen by local residents to be 'Indian', etc. Other commentators document similar reactions, as with Alexander (1996), in her study on young black Britons. Gardner and Shukkur (1994) also write about a young British Bangali boy who went to Bangladesh thinking, as his family had often described, that it was a kind of lush rural paradise. What he found did not live up to this image, leaving him feeling disappointed. Most importantly, many conclude that the idealised homeland is '... not the source of their personal and social identity' (Gardner and Shukkur 1994:158). This was the case with several of the young people in this study. They expressed disappointment with their parents' homeland for a number of reasons. Jamal, for example, found dissatisfaction even in his first trip back home at a young age. This feeling even extended to his relatives, as expressed in his description of meeting them for the first time:

My dada had told stories about what they used to get up to ... and I felt really close to them, almost like I knew them already, without even meeting them. But when I got there, and even after I got to know them for a bit, I just couldn't relate to them.

For Jamal, relatives and other residents in his parents' home town did not see him as a 'native', but as a wealthy westerner. This point came across regularly in informal discussions with others involved in this study. The instance described by Mohammed offers an example of events various young people mentioned as discomfiting. Out for a walk in his father's village,

Mohammed was distressed that villagers would come to him and ask for money or his watch. He most definitely felt like a foreigner in his father's 'homeplace'.

Only three of the Bangali boys said they would like to return to Bangladesh after their education was complete. As noted earlier, Bilal's reason was that, as a strong Muslim, he wanted to be surrounded by other practising Muslims. Thus even though Bilal proclaimed himself to be de-tangling culture from religion, and one night after a religious lecture had commented that "Most of them [Bangalis] think they're so religious but they don't really know what it is", in imagining homeland, he equated Bangladesh with religious observance. His desire to return might be seen as a political stance. The second, Sajeed, who "wouldn't mind" living in Bangladesh, was a close friend of Bilal's and was also an attendee of the Islamic lectures. Sajeed had arrived in the UK from Bangladesh at the age of 12, and had returned for one extended visit since. But in the main, while young Bangali men found short visits to Bangladesh 'fun' or 'alright', they did not want to live there permanently. The case of the third young man who expressed a desire to return to Bangladesh again highlights the contextual nature of identification. This young man had just returned from an extended trip to Bangladesh. He was telling the others in the group that at some point in the future, he would return there permanently. After a few days, I managed to catch him by himself. I told him about how, although I had enjoyed my last trip to Pakistan, I would not live there. After we talked a while, he said that he "probably won't go back there to live". In response to this I commented "I know what you mean, you have to get some money together first". He replied "No, it's not that. It's just that it's not really 'all that'<sup>1</sup> out there [his home in Bangladesh]. I mean I'd just get bored, I'd miss all my friends as well". His earlier exclamations that he wanted to return to live in Bangladesh should be seen in the context in which they were said. Firstly, when he made that statement, he was the focus of the group's attention. In order to capture this attention and promote a good impression of

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<sup>1</sup> A slang expression for unremarkable or not particularly pleasant.

himself, his family, his parents' homeland and the trip as a whole, he told them he enjoyed his visit, so much so he would have liked to go back. Secondly, the group as a whole had on many occasions expressed anti-racist and anti-white sentiments. It would have been politically incorrect for the youth to declare that he did not like his parents' homeland as this would have undermined the counter-position the group professed to hold.

The desire to remain in the UK rather than return to their/parents' country of origin was expressed more strongly by young females, with only one indicating a desire to live in Bangladesh, India or Pakistan. The words used to describe their/parents' country of origin capture the strength of their feeling, with views on 'back home' ranging from 'boring' or 'different' to 'horrible' or 'oppressive'. Neigar captured a common sentiment in stating that 'the worst' aspect of going 'back home', even for a short visit, was a lack of freedom of movement: "They watch every step you take. You can't even go out shopping by yourself or just have a walk. I was dying of boredom". Cultural differences, as seen in dissimilar expectations and the ability to upset or offend, also led to a sense of unease. As Shamista explained, when mentioning an important reason why she does not enjoy trips to Bangladesh: "They have such a different way of thinking, like about everything, money, jobs ... They're always asking you questions [her relatives in Bangladesh]. You have to be really careful what you say". It becomes apparent that the main reasons young people do not want to live in their parents' country of origin were not material considerations, nor education or employment opportunities. These were the reasons many of their parents came to the UK in the first place. Rather the key issues for these young people were that people 'back home' thought and behaved differently to them. 'Back home' was not their home.

### **Imagined ethnic communities**

On arrival in Britain, first generation Asian immigrants tended to settle in areas where there were other Pakistanis, Bangladeshis or Indians. The attraction of a particular area was often due

to the presence or proximity of family members or friends (Shaw 1988). This pattern of settlement was established not only for reasons of job opportunities, but also so the small, growing immigrant population could provide each other with support. In this manner, a close-knit community of friends, relations and members of the same village/region came to live close to each other. Despite more recent residential trends, this pattern continues to today (Ballard 1994a).

However, communities are not always bounded by locality. For first generation South-Asian émigrés, the ethnic community can stretch much farther than extended families living in nearby areas. A typical self-defined ethnic community includes groups in different cities and towns across the country that share a regional/linguistic or religious background. In addition to links to the ethnic community in a country of origin, which are normally quite strong, there may be links to ethnic communities in other parts of the world. For example, links between the Shia ishnasheri<sup>2</sup> communities of Gujerat, East Africa, North London and Canada are particularly strong. Not uncommonly, ethnic communities in the country of origin, although often looking westward for opportunities, see themselves as the body of cultural/religious authority (Sachedena 1998).

Linked to this 'authority from afar', the young people in this study felt their parents often placed expectations on them (or restricted their actions) because of 'community' expectations and taboos. Khulsoom, for example, felt her mother would have been happy with her older sister's choice of husband had he not been from a different Muslim sect. The expectation within the community is that women should marry within their own ethnic community. Asif recounted a similar example of community influence on parental actions:

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<sup>2</sup> A Shia Muslim sub-sect, with members originating mainly from Gujerat



... sometimes, when my dad's been to the mosque, he comes home really vexed, and starts saying, like that I should stop going around with X ... and I should be thinking of going to college an' that... I know he's been talking to them men down the mosque.

The ethnic community plays a great role in setting the pace of cultural change and, because of the strength of community ties, norms of behaviour are difficult to break.

One element of community 'policing' is checks made by other members of the ethnic group on families. For young people, this is often seen in comparisons of children's achievements, in terms of education, careers, beauty, marital status or religious achievement. Interviews with parents, combined with young people's descriptions of how their parents respond to comments on the family from within the community, indicate that parents are kept on their toes by such 'policing'. As Modood and associates (1994) report, this has the effect of guiding parental expectations for their off-spring. In such an interdependent community, as some South-Asian communities are, other people's achievements are advertised by parents, and 'failures' rapidly become common knowledge (see de Vries 1995 for a case study of the role of 'gossip' in the maintenance of cultural traditions amongst Turkish Muslims in the Netherlands). The result, as we have seen with Neigar's family, is that parents feel under strong pressure to make their children conform.

Significantly, in terms of questions of identity, an expectation that was regularly identified by young people as the greatest source of fear for their parents, was the maintenance of a distinct South-Asian identity, as opposed to 'westernisation'. Interviews with parents confirmed this, with strong support for the sentiment that their children should think of themselves as 'Pakistani', 'Indian' or 'Bangladeshi', and behave accordingly. Quite apart from direct statements on this theme, parents reveal a discomfort over 'westernising' tendencies, as Shamista's mother noted in a discussion that had nothing to do with this issue:

The younger one [Shamista's youngest sister] watches too much television, comedies and East Enders and things. It's not good for her. I see that she starts to back-answer me, just like she sees on the television. She has to remember that where we come from, we do not even say 'ooof' to our elders.<sup>3</sup>

Even if young people think of themselves as British, their parents held that they should have a strong sense of South-Asian identity and an awareness of their ancestry. Parents clearly wanted their children to see themselves as 'different from the English' (British). The young people were well aware of this. Describing her parents, Tina explained that:

... when they hear of something bad or when they read something in the newspapers, like that old lady who died and no-one found her for like a week, they say, 'this wouldn't happen to us, we don't do this sort of thing, because we're Indian'. They're always trying to say Indian people don't do anything bad ... and don't ever forget that I'm Indian

The parallel between undesirable behaviour and too much 'westernisation' is a common theme in the households of these South-Asian youth. So, when it came to the attention of Asif's father that one of the Bangali boys in his class had been in trouble with the police, he commented that the boy had become "too English" and had "gone wild".

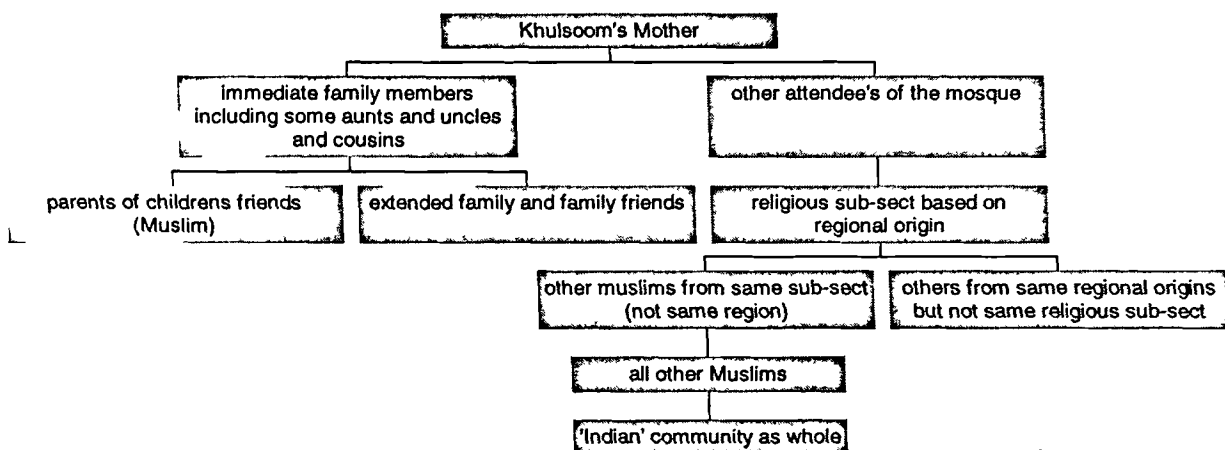
Another tactic parents used to try to instil into their children a South-Asian identity, was encouraging attendance at cultural events within the parents' ethnic community. This included religious ceremonies at the mosque, weddings, dinners and get-togethers at relations' and community members' houses. Almost all the teenagers reported that their parents actively encouraged them to make friends within their parents' ethnic community. Nearly all the young Muslims in the study, both male and female, had at some time been enrolled by their parents in Islamic religious education, or (for a small number of females) had home tutoring in Qu'ranic

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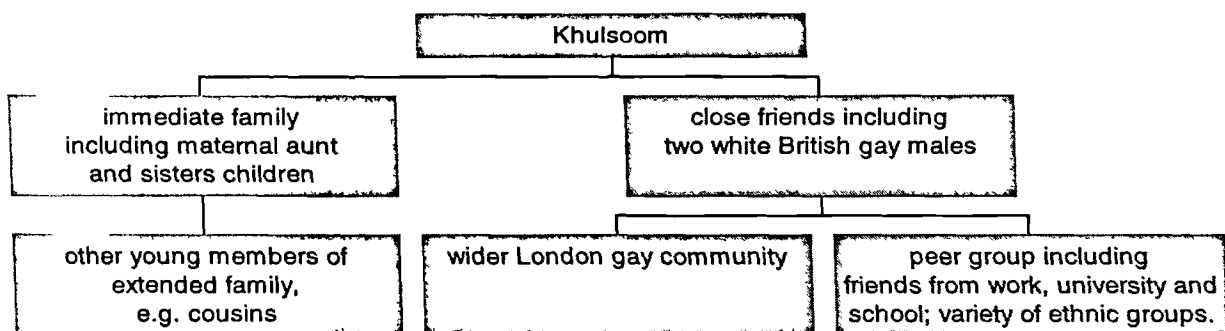
<sup>3</sup> The word 'ooof' is onomatopaeic, and is used in many South-Asian languages to describe discontent or surprise. Its 'English' equivalent would be a sharp intake of breath.

Arabic.<sup>4</sup> There was a sense amongst these young people that encouragement by their parents to attend classes was not solely for reasons of religious education. It was also seen as desirable because of the social arena in which classes took place, in which 'Asian' and Islamic values should be transmitted to young people.

**Figure 5.1 Khulsoom's mother's self-defined community**



**Figure 5.2 Khulsoom's self-defined community**



<sup>4</sup> This was not reported by any of the Hindu informants, most probably because Puja or devotion, the locus of Hinduism, is performed everyday in the home, eliminating any possible ethnogenic influence of the temple (see Bhardwaj and Rao 1990).

As Revill (1993) points out, the concept of community has considerable negative connotations. Indeed, both young people and parents confirmed that for first generation Asians, acceptance and good standing within their imagined ethnic community is vital. But at the same time the community is a source of strength and support, as many rely for friendship, business contacts, socialising, and other aspects of everyday life on the ethnic community. Revill (1993) also notes that 'community' is often viewed as "... something static and parochial, it poses limits on identity controlled by tradition and passively accepted local culture". As such, although this study found the communities of the parents had a significant impact on the choices available to the young people within the spaces of the family especially, the majority of young people did not have the same links with this 'community' as their parents. In fact, many of young people had started to re-define 'their community' in terms that are quite different from those of their parents, indicating that the 'controlling' effect of the parents' imagined community was not as powerful as some commentators suggest (see Figure 5.1 and Figure 5.2, see also Dwyer 1999).<sup>5</sup>

The exception to this position was again recent Bangali immigrants, some of whom had only been in the UK for five or six years. These young people expressed more subdued sentiments in this direction. More commonly though, the young people had decided that the ethnic community of their parents has little in common with them. This lay behind active efforts to create their own 'community linkages', based on peer ties that cut across the ethnic boundaries their parents articulated. Illustrating this through a single context, Shazia recounted that she had once asked her mother why she kept saying Shazia must look for her husband

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<sup>5</sup> Boundaries of community are likely to change with altered ethnic solidarities (Esman 1994) and so in different contexts. Figure 5.1 and Figure 5.2 are meant only as to contrast intergenerational difference. These charts were created in the home, between myself and the participant. As such, they are 'snapshots' of community as these will change as the ethnicities of the women change.

within the 'community'. Her mother replied that this was because those within the 'community' share the same background, the same food, the same language and the same religion. But Shazia felt that her mother's community did not share her language, her interests or even eat the food she wanted to. Her 'community', as she described it, included black, white and Asian friends, along with acquaintances from school, certain cousins, and others she perceived to be of the same mind-set as herself. This point has often not been brought out in the literature on South-Asian young people. More regularly, commentators have suggested that young British Asian ethnic identifications are focused on other South-Asians. Dwyer (1999) found that almost all her interviewees spoke of an 'Asian community'. This could imply a strong identification by the interviewees with all other South-Asian groups. However, this study found that while this phrase was used often by both the young people and their parents in this study (I have also used it myself), it was used unselfconsciously. Its usage did not necessarily indicate linkages between the wide range of social groups subsumed under the category 'Asian'. Moreover, the use of the phrase was restricted to Indians and Pakistanis. The Bangali youngsters in this study did not use this terminology at all.<sup>6</sup>

When asked who was included in their own definition of 'community', a wide variety of responses were given by young people. These included work and school colleagues of different

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<sup>6</sup> Although they often referred to themselves as 'Asian', they did not speak of an 'Asian community'. In general they saw themselves as different from Indians and Pakistanis. What might distinguish the responses here is that many South-Asians in the UK trace their roots to Punjab and Gujerat, in north-west of India and Pakistan, where there is a similarity in food and in some languages. Most Bangalis, by contrast, are relative newcomers in the UK. Bangalis are commonly distinguishable from those from other regions of South Asia, in their food, social class (which is often judged by South-Asians in terms of being a city or rural dweller) and in their language (see Ballard 1997). More likely though the difference is explained by the more established nature of many Indian and Pakistani communities in the UK, compared to the more recent arrival of the Bangalis.

racial backgrounds, young people in general, those with similar musical tastes, the young 'black' community in general, all Asians (including the diaspora and those living in South Asia), young professional Asians, other people who liked to travel, young family members such as cousins, mosque attendees, Palestinians, and even Saddam Hussein. Only four included those they thought their parents would include in a definition of community (for example, the mullana at the mosque or their aunts and uncles). Noticeably, all four were among those who still lived at home, and were more likely to be influenced by their parents' lifestyle and values. Furthermore, two of these four were first generation Bangalis, who, as we have seen, often held different views from the other young British Asian participants. It should be noted, however, that the information in this section has been compiled through informal unstructured interviews within particular contexts, and as others have pointed out (e.g. Dwyer 1999, Eade 1989), an imagined community will change at different times/places, depending on the politics of the context. As we will see later in chapter, linkages with other groups and the boundaries of 'community', shifted quite considerably in other contexts to include those who were previously excluded and to exclude those who at other times were included.

### **The Islamic community: recent developments**

Another phenomenon reportedly occurring alongside the Asian diaspora's changing ethnic identities has been the re-assessment of religion, particularly amongst young Muslims (Ahmed and Donan 1992, Mohdood 1994). Commentators have documented that there has been not only a revival of particular forms of Islam but that, due to recent events including the Rushdie Affair, the Gulf War, the ongoing disputes in occupied Palestine and fighting in Eastern Europe, there has been a growing awareness of the existence of a global Muslim community (Werbner 1994). In addition, processes of globalisation have had the effect of creating new alliances (Ahmed and Donan 1994), so strengthening links between British Muslims and other Islamic communities. The actual strength of such ties, however, is open to debate. While some commentators argue that revivalist Islam has led to the emergence of a self-conscious global

Muslim identity, others suggest otherwise. Dwyer (1999:60), for example, notes that, for many of her study's participants, "... being a Muslim was a part of an 'ethnic' inheritance from their parents". Being Muslim was thus an integral, and inescapable, part of a Pakistani heritage. Ballard (1994) also suggests that apart from occasions where religion is threatened in some way, like the Rushdie Affair, common religious affiliations are less important than narrower loyalties based on everyday reciprocal exchanges between members of castes, sects and regional groups. On the other hand, while the 'myth of return' has often been attributed to the maintenance of cultural traditions by immigrants, Shaw (1994) noted that a dedication to Islam rather than the myth of return was used by young British Muslims as the gel to hold together their networks and traditions.

This study found that neither the impact of linkages based on regional rather than religious commonality nor the use of Islam as a justification for the maintenance of cultural boundaries were simple to grasp. The young Muslim participants, particularly the revived Muslims, used Islam as a guide for new identifications. They also used it to deconstruct older, often non-Islamic traditions, that were held by their parents. In this, a wider trans-national Muslim community was envisaged. However, the new imagined community was operationalised at particular times and was not an all-embracing community. In this section, I will examine why some young people have chosen to adopt new forms of Islam, and to what extent an accompanying reconceptualisation of 'community' is played out in their identifications.

As already touched on in Chapter four, many younger Muslims are breaking out of the strictures put in place by their parents' community, and, to varying degrees, are conceptualising their ethnicity more in terms of a religious identity. In this sense, the young people of Muslim background investigated here were building a further distinction between themselves and their

parents. This was not because their parents did not practice Islam, but rather that the young 'revival Muslims' found it difficult to relate to the Islam practised by their parents. My participants included a small number of 'revivalist Muslims'. Bilal for example, is one of a small group of boys from the youth club who decided to leave the local mosque their fathers attended. Instead Bilal attends political and philosophical Islamic talks aimed at higher education students, which are run by young intellectuals. In this forum, the audience is exposed to a wide range of new concepts of Islam. For Sajeed, a friend of Bilal and another attendee of these lectures, the approach taken by this revivalist group was different to that of the mullahs at the mosque his father attends:

... sometimes I used to go [to the local mosque] in Ramadhan, cos they give you some iftar<sup>7</sup> later. But the mullana, he's well out of it ... He talks about such rubbish things. One day he went on for nearly an hour about wanking, and how you can't do it cos it's a sin, and I just thought, I'm outta here.

At the mosque his father attends, sermons are in Sylheti, with a focus on issues of morality and the dos and don'ts of Islam. By contrast, the sessions run by the young intellectuals include examinations of the ideology of Islam and politics in the Middle East, as well as about the making of a new world order. For Bilal: "It makes sense what they say. It's like, you know, that there's some reason for why you're doing it, rather than just doing it. It's like you're going somewhere with it". For others, it was not only that the younger religious leaders are giving a different message, but that the message is packaged in a way that is attractive to young people. Many of the new Islamic sects are strongly politicised, as was the one organising the sessions attended by these young men. Furthermore, adopting the 'new religion', and attending religious talks independent of their parents, gave attendees a feeling of choice and empowerment. The attraction was not just religion. For Karim, for example, who was a fairly recent self-proclaimed 'revivalist', yet did not practice Islam through prayers, fasting, abstinence from alcohol or other 'haram' food, as both Bilal and Sajeed did, the lectures were appreciated more

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<sup>7</sup> Ramadhan is the Islamic month spent fasting. Iftar is the meal with which you break the fast.



for the politics espoused. He, along with a number of the other attendees, focused more on the ideas of 'Jihad' or holy war that were advocated in the lectures. One evening, just as the lecture had finished, I heard him talking loudly and agitatedly to a small group of attendees including black, Persian or Arab youths:

We got'ta stick together. That's the only way we can fight them ... we're the same. All of us are Muslims fighting for the same thing. It don't matter what colour we are or if we're Sunni or Shiite or whatever, were all on the same side, right?

Contrary to the older generation's identifications, the young Muslims investigated here showed a lesser awareness of, and therefore placed less importance on, macro-regional and sectarian ties. An illustration of this was Khulsoom's comments on her parents discontent at her lack of competency in their language of origin: "I don't need to know how to speak Kutchi. Where am I going to use it except at home? I know how to read Arabic. That's the language of my religion, not Kutchi". Even for those who were not practising revivalist forms of Islam, religious affiliations were strong. As identifications made by Tariq suggested, the oppositional nature of 'Muslim' (rather than 'Pakistani' or 'Bangali', which were seen by the young people as less counter-positional) also has the potential to create linkages between Muslims and politically marginalised or counter-positional groups as diverse as Palestinians, Native Americans, Irish and Scottish. The politico-religious nature of identifications is creating linkages between groups that otherwise would not necessarily identify with each other. For example, all the 'revivalist' Bangali youths expressed the view that they identified with Algerians to some extent, because of personalised and political linkages they made at the Islamic talks. Importantly, the two most dedicated of the 'revivalists' thought of themselves primarily as Muslims, rather than as Bangalis; the latter being the dominant way other Bangali males referred to themselves at the youth club. This 'religious' identification opened up avenues of linkage with a wider range of individuals and social groups than would arise from a primary identification as 'Bangali' or even 'Asian'.

In part, this new, self-conscious identity based around Islam shows an awareness by the younger generation of the difference between their parents' cultural tradition and religious directives, and a willingness to separate the two. Yet it also supports the proposition that there is a declining importance among young Muslims of linkages based on regional origin, in favour of religious linkages (see also Scantlebury 1995, and Yalcun-Heckmann 1995 on Turkish Muslims in Germany). In this manner, a new imagined community is being created by some young Muslims. This is being forged along the lines of a politicised Islam, with links with a diverse range of groups both in the UK and abroad (see Werbner 1994). However, what has not been adequately documented in other studies is that links to other Muslims are dependent on perceived common 'ethnicity', which can change with context (Blom 1999 and Dwyer 1999 are notable exceptions). The way in which other Muslim communities are perceived depends on the definition of Muslim used by the group and the degree of similarity between the two groups being juxtaposed. Dwyer (1999), for example, points out that some of her informants had difficulties including Bosnians in their imagined Muslim community, due to their 'white' pigmentation. Although the young Muslims, especially those who attended the Islamic lectures, did identify with East European Muslims to some extent, most identified with Algerians or Ethiopians more readily due to the perception of a greater 'ethnic' commonality linked to their skin colour (see also Dwyer 1999). This perceived line of commonality (or lack of it) in defining who was part of their imagined Muslim community was very apparent in the comments made by the young Bangali Muslims while watching a short trailer for a television programme on the South-East Asian economic crisis. The trailer (seen at the youth club while watching television) showed images of Malaysian school children wearing head scarves and Malaysian Muslim men praying in a mosque. It was evident from their reactions that many of the young men found it difficult to conceive of Malaysians as Muslims. Alongside one boy exclaiming, "I didn't know there was any chinky Muslims", Sajeed's, "man, they look strange" signified the bewilderment of the group. As well as commonalties based on perceived ethnicity, linkages within a Muslim community was also defined in terms of the degree of commitment of

a 'Muslim'. Many of the young Muslims saw themselves as an ideological group, distinct from non-practising Muslims. There were those whose practices were more orthodox, and those who employed a much more liberal (or less stringent) application of Islam. This led to divisions in the way different 'Muslims' viewed each other and related to each other, based on perceived level of religious commitment and interpretation. Hence, while Bilal and Karim both attended the same Islamic lectures, there was little interaction or friendship between them. 'Tension' between them, alongside the reasons for it, was demonstrated on various occasions, as when Bilal returned from Islamic pilgrimage. In conversation about his trip, he spoke of other Muslims whom he referred to as 'hypocrites'. Speaking specifically of Karim he charged: "He's a disgrace. If he goes around telling people that he's a Muslim, they're going to think that that's what all Muslims are like. He's giving us all a bad name". There were numerous instances of distinctions being drawn between practising and non-practising Muslims. Thus, speaking of his fiancée's brother, Jamal commented: "Every time we meet he's always going on about Islam. One-day I'm just going to turn around and say to him, 'well if you're such a good Muslim then how come you drink". But this type of distinction can only be drawn when lifestyles are apparent to others. Without exception, all the young men, even though some did not practice as Muslims, wished to call themselves 'Muslim'. Without a scrutiny of their religious conviction or that of another Muslim, immediate identifications across this axis were strong. One example of this was the inclusion granted to me by the young Bangali men at the youth club, based on the fact that I am of Muslim background. My beliefs and commitment were never questioned.

Other distinctions, based on religious sect, were also frequently drawn on. One example was provided in a conversation with Karim, one of the revivalist Muslims who at one Islamic lecture had proclaimed that all types of Muslims should 'stick together'. On another occasion, after one of the Islamic lectures, he asked me to explain the difference was between Sunni and Shia Muslims. After my explanation, he commented that I was 'more like a Sunni', even though I had grown up in a Shia household. Initially, he had tried to classify me (according to a Sunni

or Shia background). Then because of the way he saw Shias as different from himself and other Sunni Muslims, rather than accepting there may be little difference between the two sects, he 'excused' or 'declassified' me, by suggesting I was 'more like a Sunni' Muslim. The revealing point is that, while suggesting I was 'not really a Shia', Karim left in place the differences between Sunni's and Shias. The suggestion that arises from these observations is the linkages between young Muslims in the study and Muslims elsewhere in the world are primarily political rather than interpretative. Blom (1999:193) points this out in her analysis of the protests surrounding the 'Rushdie Affair', noting that the strongest protests came from countries with minority, not majority, Muslim populations. She argues that these actions partly resulted from the "... insufficient national membership they enjoyed in their particular national contexts". This study certainly found there was not some kind of primordial "... 'umbilical link' between all those that are born into Islam" (Blom 1999:193). Rather the political circumstances and agendas of this very disparate group of people, including perceived threats and a sense of 'not-belonging' to a nation of residence, encouraged the identifications made by the young Muslims.

### **Changing cultural codes among young British Asians**

As young British Asian definitions of 'community' are evolving, this is being accompanied by a change in the acceptability of the different lifestyle choices. There is an assumption in much of the literature that young British Asians are 'caught between two cultures', which are incompatible with each other (e.g. Anwar 1998). What has not been demonstrated (exceptions include Back 1996), although it is theorised in some of the 'third-space' literature, is that, like any cultural system, young British Asians are actively creating, and constantly (re)negotiating, codes of behaviour they find suitable for themselves. As Ballard (1994a:34, original emphasis) points out, second and third generation British Asians are "... actively and creatively engaged in carving out *new* styles of interaction among themselves". In this section I examine the cultural codes and range of identifications and lifestyles that are evolving amongst young

British Asians. I suggest that significant in influencing identifications and lifestyle choices is the practice of deeming certain lifestyle choices as more acceptable because of the way 'British Asian-ness' is constructed and conceptualised by the young people themselves.

It was argued in Chapter two that culture is not static. Just as importantly, it is not held individually, but as a group. Individuals living within a cultural collectivity may behave strictly in accordance with the range of codes of behaviour for a cultural framework, but others may 'reside' at an extreme or boundary. It is these extremes of behaviour, whether accepted or rejected by the rest of the cultural group, that (re)define cultural norms. It is through transgressions of cultural codes of behaviour that rules and frameworks are appraised and modified. As Sarup explains (1994:103):

... a social norm is rarely expressed as a firm rule, it is really an accumulation of decisions made by a community over a long period of time. That norm retains its validity only if it is used regularly as a basis for judgement. Each time a deviant act is punished, the authority of the norm is sharpened, the declaration is made where the boundaries of the group are located ... Deviants and agencies of control are boundary-maintaining mechanisms.

Not only did the young British people in this study challenge the applicability of identifications made by their parents, but they also actively assessed and changed the cultural norms expected of other young British Asians. The formerly narrow boundaries restricting 'identity' are slowly being opened to negotiation. As Chohal (1998) suggests, many young British Asians who often in the past joined their parents in setting a firm circle around what is acceptable and what is 'Asian', are now willing to include a range of new lifestyles and ways of being.

Amongst the young people in the study, this acceptance of new identities was not uniform. In general, those who had been exposed to a greater variety of lifestyle choices through further education or their work places were the most accepting of alternative lifestyle

choices. Those still at school, in particular Bangali youngsters, were less accommodating, although this could have been more because of pressures at that age to conform with their peer group. With a few exceptions, the majority of young Bangali males, especially Malik, Bilal and Sajeed, were less willing to accept lifestyle choices they thought diminished connections with more traditional South-Asian cultures. For example, they were scornful and often made fun of a South-Asian youth-worker and researcher at the club who had a public school background, spoke with a very 'British' accent and went by a shorter, anglicised version of his name. They would often joke that he was 'whiter than Fred', a white youth-worker. They frequently referred to him as a 'bounty-bar' or 'coconut' (i.e. brown on the outside but white on the inside). In contrast, they did not have the same disregard for a couple of Bangali boys who exhibited an overtly 'black' identity in terms of the music they listened to, the clothes they wore, and the language and accent they used. This went beyond the fact the boys were from the same area and peer group. Politically, being 'black' was more acceptable than being 'white'. This was intimated when I asked one of the boys why they made fun of the Asian youth-worker. He replied: "He's trying to be what he's not. He thinks he's one of them".

With a single exception, young males were less prepared to accept the idea that young females could pursue 'alternative' lifestyle choices, especially if the choice was deemed to be 'un-Asian'. Thus, although Jamal had a long interest in motorbikes, and was considering purchasing one himself, he was annoyed when his fiancée purchased one, along with accompanying leather riding clothes. His message to me on this occasion was very clear: "... I don't want the future mother of my children riding about with all her leather gear on a motorbike". This pattern of response was met regularly during fieldwork. As a further illustration, when Jimmy, a night-club DJ, found he was short of a DJing partner one night, I indicated I would be prepared to fill in. I commented that if I liked it enough I might even give up my studies. His response was that this type of work was "alright for a bloke", but because it invariably involved late nights and "dodgy" clubs, it was "... not the sort of thing a girl should be doing". Another

example came from Tariq, whom I felt was particularly open-minded. Despite this, 'double standards' were evident in his comments about a friend of mine. She had turned down an invitation to come out with us one evening, in favour of spending time with another group of friends. These other friends were quite riotous fun-loving people, many of them working in the media industry. None were British Asian, and several were gay. When I met Tariq that evening and told him my friend would not be joining us because she was seeing her other friends, he commented: "I guess she's too busy trying to prove that she's not Asian". In contrast to his disapproval of my friend's lifestyle, the fact he had very few British Asian friends and lived what might be considered an 'alternative' lifestyle, was not seen to be inconsistent with this view.

Although these young people accepted alternative identities for British Asians to some extent, this was invariably dependent on whether the choice could be considered 'Asian' or whether, in their minds, it crossed over into another 'ethnic' boundary. Yet for young males, the appropriation of a 'black' image was accepted, while an overly 'white' one was not. During the course of fieldwork I was able to record a range of broad categories of identification or lifestyle choices that young people generally thought were 'off-limits' for British Asians. As Table 5.3 highlights, a characteristic that distinguishes categories of identification as off-limits is their 'white', middle-class associations. This was true for those of middle-class and working-class backgrounds.

What was acceptable was anything that did not seem to deny an 'Asian connection', or did not draw strongly on cultural influences other than those perceived to be 'Asian' or 'British Asian'. Musical tastes were also seen to be important in distinguishing between acceptable and unacceptable identifications. Certain choices of music were seen to be less 'Asian' than others (Table 5.4); such as European classical, country and western and, interestingly, despite its black roots, jazz and the blues. That said, amongst the acceptable music categories, rave, dance,

garage, house are all dominantly white genres, although they can be seen as challenging dominant white societal values.

**Table 5.3 The acceptability of lifestyle choices**

<b>LESS ACCEPTABLE LIFESTYLES</b>	<b>ACCEPTABLE LIFESTYLES</b>
Goths <sup>8</sup>	Rude-boys and fly-girls <sup>9</sup>
Punks <sup>10</sup>	TPs and FOBs <sup>11</sup>
New-age travellers	Professionals
Indie/grungy types <sup>12</sup>	Religiously inclined
Rugby boys, hockey-girls <sup>13</sup>	Ravers <sup>14</sup>

This defining of a pattern of acceptability/non-acceptability of lifestyle choices according to a yardstick of 'Asianess' (or resistance to dominant white middle-class values) is similar to that reported by Alexander (1996) in her research on black identities. Alexander found that certain

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<sup>8</sup> Characterised by dressing in black or dark colours with heavy pale make-up, this is usually but not necessarily associated with a belief in the occult.

<sup>9</sup> A 'Black' subcultural style.

<sup>10</sup> This is usually associated with British patriotism.

<sup>11</sup> TP is an abbreviation for 'typical Paki' and FOB for 'fresh-off-the-boat', both referring to very recent immigrants, or those who are not westernised.

<sup>12</sup> This type of music which is linked to a British/American youth counter-culture which is often connected with recreational drug-use.

<sup>13</sup> Public school attendees or those exhibiting white middle-class sub-cultural styles and values.

<sup>14</sup> Although also associated with music cultures that are dominated by white artists and the use of recreational drugs, this lifestyle is not seen as having particular white middle-class associations.



lifestyles and codes of behaviour were expected of blacks, such that those who chose lifestyles outside this definition were not considered to be black. Transgressions, she noted, can be small details from choice of clothes to language. This is illustrated in the comments of one of Alexander's informants after being introduced to a well-spoken, middle-class black male: "Where did you find these guys, then? Nobody says 'chaps'. He ain't no black man" (1996:30). However, what Alexander (1996) does not mention is the class aspect involved in this situation. In this study it was found that youngsters from lower-income households, particularly Bangali males, were more accepting of sub-cultural lifestyles that drew from black influences, while those from higher income backgrounds (although not necessarily with higher education) were less likely to reject sub-cultural lifestyle choices with 'white associations'.

**Table 5.4 The acceptability of music tastes**

<b>LESS ACCEPTABLE MUSIC TASTES</b>	<b>ACCEPTABLE MUSIC TASTES</b>
European classical	R&B,
Country and western	Soul
Jazz and blues	Hiphop, rap
Indie and grunge	Pop
Heavy metal	Reggae
Punk rock	Funk
Techno	Jungle, drum and bass
	Indian classical and pop
	Bhangra, Kawali
	Salsa and Latin dance
	Rave, dance, garage, house

This class-differentiated acceptance of lifestyle choices ran counter to the evidence presented in Chapter four, which suggested there was little British Asian middle-class identification with white middle-class individuals/groups. This contradiction highlights the contextual nature of linkages to other groups and to processes of identification. Linkages to other ethnic groups will be explored in more depth in the section 'black politics: relations with other ethnic minority groups'.

In some cases, where individuals held views contrary to the rest of their peer group, these were not mentioned. Homosexuality, for example, was seen to be strictly unacceptable by most male respondents and by several females (especially Bangali and younger girls). Shahid, a young Bangali male, with whom I attended a further education college in north London, provided an example of the way the majority view is difficult to challenge without compromising one's membership of the group. This occurred after a discussion in our Media course on homosexuality. A television programme had been aired the evening before, which had shown sexually explicit scenes between two men. The class shared their feelings about the programme, although discussion became more general. Views on homosexuality were quite varied, with the females in the class more accepting or ambivalent, while the males held stronger views. One young black male, a friend of Shahid's commented that homosexuality was unnatural, and therefore 'wrong'. The views Shahid articulated were amongst the most liberal. For instance, one of his comments was that, "... it's up to them, if that's what they want to do. You shouldn't stop people, and if TV's supposed to be about what goes on and what people do, then it's all right to show it as well". Later that week Shahid was in the canteen with a group of mainly Indian and Pakistani students, and some Turkish-Cypriot males, when someone made a derisive comment about a young man who passed through the canteen, implying he was gay. The banter quickly turned to the television programme. The views expressed by this group were less varied and far less accepting than in the class itself. It was noticeable here that Shahid kept out of the

general conversation, but made a few derogatory remarks, such as singing, in a high-pitched voice, "batty-boys, batty-boys".<sup>15</sup> He did not voice the liberal opinions he had earlier expressed earlier in the week. This was unusual for Shahid, since he was usually vocal in his opinions, even if they diverged from those held by the rest of the group. Exploring this turnaround, it is necessary to understand the context of Shahid's group position at the time. The week before, the other boys in his peer group, of whom Shahid was the only one on the Media course, had found out he was taking part in a theatre production put on by the Media and English departments, with Shahid in a lead role. They had made fun of him, calling him a 'pansy', and generally contesting his sexuality. Although this ribaldry had not been repeated, if Shahid had aired the feelings on homosexuality he expressed in the Media class, he would have re-highlighted his difference to the rest of the group, so threatening his continued membership. In this way, the dominant view on homosexuality held by the group remained unchallenged, although individuals within the group may have held different opinions.

In cases where British Asians diverged from the accepted pattern of lifestyle choices, they were seen as 'selling-out' their cultural heritage, of becoming 'too white'. The choice of lifestyle was an issue of solidarity and maintaining group boundaries. If this was not done through personal obligation, then other members of the imagined group would try coercion, as with Shahid, or exclude, as with the Asian-youth-worker.

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<sup>15</sup> This is a slang term for a homosexual man which carries negative connotations.

## **On the Street: Local Communities and Beyond**

### **Place-based identifications**

Commentators have suggested that the notion of 'the myth of return' held by Asians has discouraged identification with Britain. This proposition has not been extended to the younger, often British-born, population. This section will present evidence suggesting that identifications based on local place, or residential area, were significant amongst the young British Asians in the study. However, residential locality is just one social space, and the identities created and exhibited here are again contextual. They may therefore not be exhibited in other social spaces. As such, residential locality must be seen as a resource that is at times drawn upon in identification, and at other times rejected in favour of the primacy of other allegiances.

It has been noted that the residential locality in which one lives has a major effect on identity. Bachu (1993), for example, asserts that the identities of young Asian women from London are different to those from Northern Ireland or Scotland. Mac an Ghail (1988), similarly argue that localities offer a more compelling identification than cultural commonalities or the class structure in which minority ethnic groups have been socialised. This is an important axis of identification that has been left unexplored by much of the qualitative literature on ethnic minorities and identity. It may provide clues as to the importance of identification of young British Asians with Britain and places in Britain, and whether British Asian identities may be different from other Asian diasporic identities or even those within South-Asia. As Burnham and Harris (1996:136) note:

It may not be sufficient to define ethnicity as the colour of skin or the nationality of the person. It might be important to include particular national/regional affiliations expressed ... for example 'white/Northern English', 'black/South Birmingham', 'Welsh Valleys/white. The terms used and

the ordering of those terms may be used to reflect how, at this particular point, the person constructs their identity

As this study has already shown, linkages to other Asians that were articulated by parents were often based on a common region, language, caste, sect, family village, and so on (parental interviews, see also Scantlebury 1995). These types of identification were far less apparent amongst their children. As other studies have suggested (e.g. Modood et al 1994), the young British Asians investigated were far more likely to draw distinctions based on regional or residential localities within the UK. As Bachu (1993:109) notes: "London Sikh women are as much Londoners, products of various sub-cultures in the capital, as they are Jat or Ramagarhia Sikhs depending on their class affiliations". She points out that this is not particular to modern-day Britain, for early Sikh settlers in California were similarly influenced by local Mexican cultural styles.

Throughout the fieldwork undertaken here, numerous situations and comments highlighted the importance of place in the construction of young British Asian identities. British regional stereotypes were frequently drawn on. One illustration was the comments made one evening by Malik's cousin, who had come to London for a short trip from Sheffield. While walking outside, Malik had remarked that the weather had turned cold, to which his cousin made comments about "softy southerners", saying that Malik needed to come to Sheffield to get "hardened-up". Although the comments made by Malik's cousin were most probably made in jest, they reveal the use of British regional labels, which were felt to be applicable to apply to young British Asians, as well as other Britons. Neither of the young men mentioned Pakistan or the climate in Pakistan.

What came across clearly during my fieldwork, although this has rarely been documented (but see Bachu 1993), is that UK place or locality-based identifications were, in many contexts, more important to young British Asians than identifications based on country or region of

origin. One example was the comment made by Nita, the only other British Asian on my undergraduate course, who came from Hampshire. She told me that on the first night of our induction weekend, at the reception for students and staff, she heard me telling another student that I was from London. After hearing this she said that she did not particularly want to make friends with me. This was because her Hampshire peer group had a particular opinion of 'London girls', who were seen to be unfriendly and have a 'bad attitude'. Nita believed that the determining factor in my personality, and hence her basis for judging whether we would get along, was the fact I came from London, rather than the fact that my parents, like hers, were of Asian origin. It is surprising that these regional identifications have been largely ignored in detailed studies of British Asian identities, in favour of assumptions of ethnic commonality based on territorial origins.

During fieldwork illustrations of the strength of regional British identity were readily and regularly visible amongst British Asian youths. Take the example of the Bangali youngsters I got to know at the youth centre. Much of the literature about Bangalis has highlighted their difference from other South-Asian groups, such as the Indians, who have had a longer presence in the UK. Bangali communities have been noted for being particularly 'encapsulated' (Eade et al 1997, Ballard 1994a), which suggests youngsters might be more likely to see themselves as Bangali than British. The articulation of a strong 'Bangali' identity was certainly found during my fieldwork, but this was accompanied by strong linkages based on commonalities other than perceived ethnic origin. Table 5.5 sheds some light on the extent to which a perceived common Bangali ethnicity existed for these youths in the space of their local area. The table shows the composition of rival gangs who lived in the area immediately around the youth club. There were two main gangs who fought each other and had very tight membership. What is significant here is that gang membership was based on peer linkages through lived neighbourhood, school and work, rather than regional origin.

**Table 5.5 Residential origin and other characteristics of core gang members**

<b>GANG 1 CORE MEMBERS</b>	<b>GANG 2 CORE MEMBERS</b>
Mustafa: Shyleti, Hildon area, MacDonald's employee	Jamshed: Sylheti, Eubury area
Malik: Pakistani, Northdon area, MacDonalds employee	Moush: Sylheti, Eubury area
Ron: Mixed white British and Sylheti, Eubury area	Habib: non-Sylheti Bangali, Eubury area
Kashif: Sylheti, Hildon area	Mansoor: Pakistani, Eubury area
	Kazi: Pakistani, Northdon area

Both gangs had members of different South-Asian origin,<sup>16</sup> but members of each gangs had residential commonalties. Gang two even name themselves after the street on which a majority of their members lived. These gangs were involved in fights not only with white youths in central London but more frequently with each other. The dislike between the two gangs was intense. These young British Bangalis, some of whom were first generation immigrants, were constructing differences between themselves based on micro-region. One incident that brought out the underlying strength of British 'regional' identity amongst these Bangali youth occurred

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<sup>16</sup> Table 5.5 shows the core members of these gangs, as defined by those who exhibited the strongest commitment to the gang and the strongest peer linkages with others in the gang. Most of the other members of both gangs, who all had more of a 'part-time' and provisional membership, were overwhelming Bangali since both the Hildon and Eubury areas had more Bengali and Somali residents, with a small population of Indian and Pakistani residents.

on a trip to Cornwall. This incident reveals that differences based on locality were not only constructed within Bangali groups, as it could be argued that this was primarily for the purpose of deconstructing and categorising a large group, but that differences based on locality were drawn between themselves and other British groups. The trip to Cornwall was organised by the youth centre. During the trip a group of Bangali males had become involved in some 'trouble' at an amusement arcade, where they encountered a group of four or five white youths and one black youth. Words were exchanged and one of the Bangali boys pulled out an air-rifle he had brought with him from home. The other group quickly dispersed without anyone being hurt. When the youth leader found out about the incident he asked the boys what had happened and why one of them had brought his air-rifle with him. The boy who owned the rifle explained:

I thought it's better to bring it, just in case, you know ... anyway, we showed them, didn't we. We couldn't let 'em think people from London are pussies. Now they know we're hard, and we don't mess around.

Significantly, the boy described himself and the others as being from 'London', rather than as 'Bangali' or 'Asian'. This contrast was made despite the fact that the other boys involved in the incident were mainly white, and none Asian. What should also be noted is that, back at the youth club, these boys, in opposition to other gangs, such as some of the white gangs in their neighbourhood, would talk often about 'Bangalis against whites'.

However, although so far I have documented situations where locality-based linkages were given priority in identifications, as the next examples highlight, there were contexts in which identification was based primarily on imagined ethnic commonalities as counter-positional. One evening an Asian man of about 35 came into the club to seek help with a racist attack that he had experienced in his shop. He wanted a group of boys to come to his shop the following evening armed with whatever they could find. He would take them to where he knew the group of white youths who had attacked him would be. After the man left, I asked the boys if they knew him. They did not. They did not use his shop, for it was not in their neighbourhood. I asked the boys if they were going to do as the man had asked. Mustafa, one of



the leaders, replied "... he's not from round here, but Pakistanis and Bangalis got to stick together when there's trouble". Their willingness to help was partly bravado, aided by the ego-boost that they had been sought for help because of their reputation. But there was an immediate identification with another individual (or group) that was subject to attacks similar to those Bangalis experienced in the neighbourhood. The other point to note from this situation was the importance of a perceived commonality, based on shared experiences of racism. This took precedence over place-based differences, both in the context of country of origin, and residential locality in London. This was evident in Mustafa's words, "he's not from round here, but...". As noted before, the Bangali boys were far less likely to speak of a pan-Asian community, but in this context, the boundaries of community were constructed according to experiences of racism. This led to a 'boundary shift' shift to include an individual who, in other contexts, may not have been included.

Another strong example illustrating this general picture occurred in conversation in a London bar. One evening while with Jamal, Mohammed and Tariq, there was a soccer match on television. West Ham were playing Southampton. The boys had not come to the bar to watch the match, for neither team was the favourite of any of them, but their attention was drawn to the game. At one point Tariq uttered words of encouragement to the West Ham team. Mohammed, sounding surprised, asked Tariq why he was supporting West Ham. He replied that he liked one of the players, an Italian. A short discussion about the player took place. This culminated in Mohammed saying, "... anyway, it doesn't matter. You still can't support them. Their fanclub's full of Nazis". Jamal replied that a lot of Bangalis supported West Ham and the club was encouraging ethnic minorities from the East End to join them. He suggested that Mohammed, because he was Bangali, and had lived in the East End when he was younger, should support West Ham. Mohammed's response was sharp: "Don't be stupid. And the Bangalis who support them don't know anything. Look at them [pointing to a group of white youths sitting across the pub watching the game], and him [pointing to a white West Ham player on the screen], they'd probably

kick your head in at the first opportunity". In this last comment, Mohammed was referring to a recent incident in which a West Ham player had directed several kicks at a (fellow West Ham) Israeli player's head. Another short discussion took place on racism and West Ham. By the end of the discussion, although Tariq was neutral, while still encouraging the Italian player for West Ham, Jamal was no longer purporting to support West Ham. Instead he was proclaiming his support for Southampton. A counter-positional ethnic identity had been operationalised by Jamal and Mohammed in response to perceived racism. This counter-position was powerful enough to overcome place-based allegiances. Thus, identities created within local spaces of interaction, such as area of residence and preferred areas for recreation, depended greatly upon the other groups sharing these spaces, their perceptions of young people, and the perception of others by the young people. Locality identifications were based as much on perceived common experiences and understandings as were other axes of identification. In this way, locality can be conceived of as a particular type of social space, with a particular network of social relations through which an identity is constructed. Furthermore, the contribution to identifications made by the local area can also be conceived of as an 'ethnic resource' that may be operationalised in certain contexts and to different degrees, and ignored in others.

As we have seen, residential locality has had a significant impact on the construction and differentiation of identities of participants of the study. However, the space of the locality is just one example of a space of interaction. The locality and its particular discourses and experiences should not be dismissed, as it does indicate a 'sense of belonging' of young people within a particular context. However, it should be remembered that it is just one space into which the meanings, desires and expectations are inscribed. It is one of the many changing and changeable social spaces within which young people interact and negotiate their identities. However, as well as space being a 'subjective' host to the enactment of social relations, place itself is contextual, and has different meanings attached to it under different social relations.

The meanings of places are the outcome of social relations, as I will further illustrate in the final section in this chapter on notions of 'home' and 'belonging'.

Having examined more generally the extent to which the young people identified with their local areas, in the next section I explore the different types of interaction that were observed amongst the young British Asians in local areas with other social groups. In particular I will look at the way an exaggerated ethnic identity is constructed as a defence strategy in situations of intimidation or derision.

### **The symbolic use of the 'othered' identity**

The configuration of an 'othered' identity amongst young British Asians in this study was always found to be used for political purposes. One strategy for interaction that was particularly common amongst younger male Bangalis and Pakistanis of working-class background, was an exaggerated ethnicity and aggressive behaviour. This was a protective/defensive response to negative attitudes by other groups with whom they interacted. This was exhibited frequently by Bangali boys from the youth club. Aside from taking on black sub-cultural styles, such as their choice of music and clothing, they also used an exaggerated Bangali ethnicity, especially when they felt threatened by an outside group. As Mohammed put it, "... it's like we're saying, look at us, we got no jobs and no education, no ambitions. it's a piss-take of ourselves, but a hardened piss-take". Amongst the various clear expressions of this process that were observed during fieldwork, one occurred when staying at the Cornish youth hostel with the Bangali boys from the youth centre. One evening, while eating dinner, some other guests, two white, English, 40-ish aged men, came in to the kitchen. The boys were eating their food with their hands, and one of the men asked if they always did this or was it just that there were no clean forks or spoons. After a few seconds of silence, one of the boys replied that he did not know how to use a fork. Another said that they do not use plates at home, as they prefer to eat off the floor, and others laughed and made primate-like noises. The men were visibly shocked. Later, one of them explained that he

had asked his question as a joke, referring to the disorganised state of the hostel's kitchen. He and his companion demonstrated quite an elaborate knowledge of South-Asia and South-Asian social systems. As the evening progressed the boys changed their attitude to these men and their manner of talking with them changed. But at first, in response to a perceived ethnocentrism or even possible racism, they immediately adopted an exaggerated, mocking ethnicity, in order to re-appropriate representations of themselves, and hence, the social space.

The use of colour or perceived commonalities as 'symbolic resources' (Hastrup 1996:156) in creating an ethnicity was consistent in the interactions of young Bangali males, although it was rarely observed with other young participants. It became clear that, for the British Bangalis, opposition and experience of white racism is central to their identities. All the young Bangalis in the study claimed to have experienced racism for themselves. Many lived in areas where racism is an everyday issue, as highlighted by the actions of the BNP in the East End (which builds on an intense history of local racism; Husbands 1982). This environment makes it more difficult for young Bangalis to place themselves as British. Such a step would ally them with the people who despise them. Hence there is an element in their identification that embodies a desire, in such contexts at least, to present themselves as much as possible as un-British. Recognising that they are often portrayed in popular accounts as delinquents, as violent and as drop-outs, they are 'encouraged' to live up to this image (Watt and Stenson 1998). An illustrative incident that exemplifies this theme occurred when Raj met a female journalist who was visiting the area. She was asking questions about recent fighting in the area. He asked her, as a joke, if she wanted to buy some heroin. She had asked where he could get it from. He replied that his friend, who lived in a block nearby, was a dealer, but she could not accompany him there. She asked if his friend carried a weapon, and he replied that everyone did, even he did. With that he moved his jacket to the side and gave her a quick glance of the bulge his wallet made in his pocket, saying that it was a knife. When I asked him why he had done this,

he replied that the woman "... obviously came looking for a Bangali b-boy [bad-boy<sup>17</sup>] so I gave her one". A story featuring this encounter appeared later that week in the newspaper, including references to 14 and 15 year-old Bangalis carrying knives and dealing in drugs (*Evening Standard*, 13 November 1996).

Yet, most commonly, manipulating identities was not undertaken in a defensive or confrontational manner. Nor did it employ an exaggerated ethnicity. Rather it was about trying to identify in a way as to 'fit in' with the relationships of a social space. Even young Bangalis tried to play down or under-emphasise their ethnicity in some situations. As the next example demonstrates, this could be done through self-effacing references to their ethnicity; the employment of this tactic being used mostly when there were positive perceptions from others in a shared social space. An example that illustrates this practice is the time the youth centre organised an outing to watch a play on race and racism. This was attended by a group of about 10 Bangali and Pakistani males, including Karim and Mustafa, and two of the female participants, Neigar and Shazia. The play, entitled 'Race, Diversity, Culture, Roots', was a small theatre production put on by a British Asian team. It was showing in an area of south London most of the boys did not know. On arriving at the location they found a crowd of (what they held to be) trendy, young-ish people - black, white and Asian. On looking around at the other attendees, one of the leaders in the group, Karim, commented to the others: "We all have to act like we're decent people, right". Immediately understanding what Karim meant, one of the others was offended and asked: "What? you mean, not like rude-boys". "Yeah," replied Karim, at which Mustafa elaborated, "none of this", and did an exaggerated impression of a 'rude-boy', walking along with his pelvis tilted and his hands in his back pockets. This was a walk many of the

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<sup>17</sup> A 'b-boy' is an appropriation of the black usage of 'bad-boy', which is used to describe a male who has a bad attitude, dresses in a particular fashion or is involved in crime. It is used in a counter-positional way and does not have a negative meaning.

boys, including Karim and Mustafa, had 'performed' on the way from the minibus to the venue. The self-mockery immediately made light of Karim's initial comment, although it was evident that the request was still in place. Karim had seen that the other attendees were from a different socio-cultural background to them. He wanted the group to 'fit in'. Because the audience was there to watch a play about racism, he did not envisage they were going to be prejudiced toward, or judgmental of, the boys. Therefore, he suggested challenging dominant representations of Bangali youth through reinforcing the positive image the audience held of them. The way he suggested doing this was to avoid performing the exaggerated ethnicity they adopted when on the street.

As this example demonstrates, the manner in which 'ethnic' resources are mobilised and ethnicity projected is subject to change, depending on social context. This means the 'projection' itself can be complex. For instance, compared with the last example, there were various occasions in which the social dynamics involved were complicated, with the youngsters simultaneously 'playing up' and 'playing down' their identifications. This 'strategy' was also part of the same process of 'fitting in' to a social space and the different social groups present. On their own, when at the youth centre, the Bangali youngsters often talked about the police and other 'authorities' as racist, referring to "... all white people [as] racist bastards". This underlying position was mediated when the boys were involved in a community-based photography project that was sponsored by the local council to foster better relations between young Bangalis and the white, mainly older, residents in their neighbourhood. An exhibition and award ceremony for the project was held at the local library, with the Bangali boys involved in the project receiving certificates of accomplishment. The presentation of these awards was made by the Mayor, who praised the boy's work. The boys were obviously pleased with their achievements and the praise directed at them by the Mayor. During the ceremony, they joked amongst themselves, constantly aware of differences between themselves and other attendees, especially in terms of social class. They joked about being in the 'presence' of 'authorities', with comments

like: "Shall I ask her [the Mayor] if she can find me a six bedroom council house". The boys were well aware of local discourses about Bangalis. But within this non-threatening environment, they chose to make fun of those images. It was not the Mayor that was the butt of the joke, for back at the youth club the boys gave the Mayor their seal of approval. A typical statement of approval that was made by one of the youths was: "... she's alright, she's a Bangali girl. She had all them gold chains and that 'round her neck", referring to her chain of honour. The earlier comments referring to their ethnicity were part of the process of fitting into a space in which individuals of other backgrounds and social classes were present, with whom the boys would not normally have interacted in this way. In a social space in which those present had positive impressions of the young men, through the photography project, they seemed embarrassed by local discourses about Bangalis. They dealt with them by making fun of themselves, so appropriating control of these discourses, and implying they were not a part of them. At the same time, the boys were embarrassed in front of each other for fraternising with social groups they usually made fun of, whom they believed were prejudiced toward them. Comments referring to their ethnicity were made to draw a line of difference between themselves and the other social groups present, to indicate to the other Bangalis that they had not 'sold-out'. This became evident in Sajeed's comment to others from the youth club immediately after collecting his certificate and having his photo taken with the Mayor. He had had a small conversation with the Mayor at this time. When one of the other boys had asked why he had spent such a long time talking with the mayor, Sajeed joked, "I couldn't help it, she was asking me if she could get free popadoms if she comes 'round to the restaurant". In this comment Sajeed simultaneously drew on stereotypes held about British people and Indian food, and reinforced that the Mayor and he were of different backgrounds. By using the words "I couldn't help it", he also suggested he had not wished to talk to the Mayor, so implying he had not identified with her or 'sold-out'.

As Esman (1994) notes, the interest of a group can be multiple, and loyalties can be multiple, sometimes leading to a conflict in choices of action. Indeed, within the group context,

the boys did not show that they were pleased with the recognition their work on the project received. However, when I talked with them individually, it was made clear they felt this was an important achievement. Comments made by Mustafa were particularly interesting, as he was often in trouble with the police and was usually the most vociferous in discussions on racism. During the presentation, an elderly Bangali man arrived looking rather dishevelled. He held his hand across his chest, under his coat, in an awkward manner. This prompted Mustafa to fantasise about the man's intentions. He relayed this fantasy to another youth-worker and myself when out of ear-shot of the other boys. The fantasy was that the man pulled a gun from under his coat and pointed it at the Mayor, screaming abuse and threatening to kill her. Mustafa imagined himself jumping in, wrestling the man, kicking the gun away, and pulling out his own knife, so he could hold the man down until the police arrived. Mustafa envisaged that the Mayor would give him a medal and be 'eternally grateful' to him. This was an unusual fantasy of approval from a boy who regularly voiced very strong anti-white and anti-establishment views. It suggests Mustafa's anti-establishment views were formed in counter-action to the negative views held by other groups about young Bangalis. In a situation where it was evident the Mayor and others held positive ideas about the young men, Mustafa played out a fantasy in which those views were reinforced by his actions.

In one-on-one situations, the attitudes and behaviour of the Bangali boys were often quite different toward other ethnic groups and individuals in the local area. On their own, these Bangali youths would stop and talk to old people in the street, especially after the photography project. But when in a group, where a gang mentality and high spirits usually prevailed, older people were afraid of the same boys. In this context, the boys did not stop to talk to elderly people. As Hastrup (1996) points out, minorities may even compete with each other in terms of denying majority links and qualities. This point fits the situation described here, as the boys did not want to be seen fraternising with those whom the majority of local Bangali youngsters saw as causing trouble for them. In other situations, as we see in the next section, even though the



perception of a particular group may be negative, linkages with individuals from that group are often made and justified because the individual is 'different' from the others in her/his group.

Instances where young people in the study 'de-ethnicised' their identities involved immediate, subtle changes in behaviour, accent or manner of talking, as well as pre-planned changes. This element of pre-planning was evident in the choice of clothing. Clothes were often selected to convey the 'right' ethnic image. Shazia was one of a large number of the participants who made this point consciously. She indicated how she thinks carefully about what she wears when she goes shopping outside her local area. This was especially the case on the few times she had gone to the West End of London. On these occasions she prefers to wear 'English' clothes rather than her salwar-kameez. She also styles her hair differently. She explained why.

It's like, if you're wearing Punjabi suit, everyone stares at you, even the Asian people ... in the shops, you don't get served properly. They think that if you're wearing a Punjabi suit you're really backward and don't have any money and you aren't going to buy anything, so it's just not worth their time ... they'd rather serve a white person.

Neigar also did not like to wear her salwar-kameez when she went out, because she felt people looked at her differently. She believed people saw her as a "...good, little Bangali girl", in a stereotypical sense. Even though she said the outfit did not make her feel any different about herself, she felt that people saw her differently, compared with when she wears western clothes. The reports I received on this point I easily identified with, as I also feel that wearing national costume is suitable for particular situations. On occasion I have had to move around London in a salwar-kameez or sari and have always felt uncomfortable. This is because the clothes, and the 'ethnicity' others interpret as signified by them, can hamper successful and comfortable interaction in social spaces encountered on the streets. As Neigar's comments (below) signify, the young women did not dislike wearing salwar-kameez as such, but did dislike doing so in spaces they felt it conveyed an image they were uncomfortable with:

don't get me wrong, I'm not saying I'm embarrassed to be what I am. I don't mind wearing it to wedding and other things, or even at home. It's just when you go out with it on, you know what people are thinking about you, and its not really what you are.

'De-ethnicising' was also performed by males if they believed it would help achieve a desired aim. This was illustrated when Mustafa and Malik, amongst others, were seeking to gain entry to a night-club. The young men were uncharacteristically quiet in the queue for night-club entry. Even though the group was toward the back of the queue, out of sight of the bouncers, when one boy pulled out a joint, the others reprimanded him, telling him he would spoil their chances of getting in. This behaviour manipulation could be extended to young men of all ethnicities, since it was a lot harder generally for men to get into the night-club than for women. But for this club, the clientele was mainly white (with some black) and middle-class. Malik especially felt they would have a harder time getting in because of their colour. When we reached the door, the black bouncer refused us entry because Malik was wearing a pair of training shoes. The boys felt that the refusal on the basis of Malik's trainers was just an excuse, but at first pleaded politely with the bouncer. When it became evident we were not going to be let in, Malik and Mustafa began to behave in an aggressive manner. Their accents changed from that of polite tones to accented English and their body language became more aggressive. Mustafa started to swear in Bangali as we walked away from the club. In the first instance, the young men had attempted to 'de-ethnicise' in order to gain entry to a social space they felt was not accepting of their ascribed ethnicity. When they were denied access, they re-assumed this ascribed ethnicity as a defensive/offensive tactic. This contrasts greatly with the situation at the theatre production, when some of the same young men deliberately played down their counter-positional Bangali ethnicities in order to 'fit in' with what they judged to be a non-discriminatory space of interaction.

### **Black politics: relations with other minority groups**

Another minority ethnic group that Asians have often been grouped together with politically are the black-British (e.g. Mac An Ghaill 1988, Parmar 1982, Amit-Talai and Knowles 1996, Cambridge 1996, Mehra 1996). 'Black' is used by both left and right wing groups as a political category, with Asians and other minority groups often included in this category. Asian inclusion under a 'black' label has been criticised by some commentators (e.g. Modood 1988, Brah 1992), as not only not beneficial, but even detrimental, to Asians and the other minority groups subsumed (see also discussion in Banton 1997). Social researchers have asserted that racism is the defining condition of minority ethnic groups in the UK (CCCS 1982, Troyna 1993, Keith 1993) and the shared experience of racism necessitates a single political grouping 'black'. However, the racisms that groups suffer can be different. They are based on a variety of cultural resources, with colour of skin acting only as a primary demarcation. Furthermore, because Asians are only 'black' politically, whereas blacks are black politically and by self-definition, the latter are the ones with the most to gain from this political categorisation. It is as if 'Asian' has been included only as a minority group with related interests. Moreover, the inclusion of Asians as black, even as a political strategy, is a flawed project, since the main objective of minority groups is the re-appropriation of power to define themselves (e.g. Modood et al 1994, Hall 1996). Since, other than superficially, Asians and (say) Afro-Caribbeans are different social groups, and have been defined differently in popular racist discourse, this cannot be a joint project. In this section, I examine relationships of the young British Asians with black individuals and groups to see whether identifications do exist, what form they take, and possible reasons for this.

As found in other situations, young people's attitudes towards blacks in their spaces of interaction were quite different from their parents, and were predicated on a dissimilar factors. Young South-Asian linkages to other ethnic groups are guided more by personal experience than are their parents' generation, whose experiences and perceptions are partly historically

determined (Modood et al 1994), and partly determined through stereotypes of experiences they have not encountered. A vivid example for me was the relaying of an incident by a female friend of my mother when one of her friends was mugged in London by a group of young people. In telling the story she stressed several times that the boys were Somali, expecting a reaction from my mother and me. She felt the fact they were Somali made them somehow more dangerous. As with many first generation immigrants, she had little familiarity with black groups like Somalis and Afro-Caribbeans. This is in contrast with the familiarity that a lot of younger Asians have with black people through work, education and other social spaces. For many of the older generation that are familiar with blacks, as in the case of my mother's friend and one of the participants parents, it has often been through life in East Africa. But much of the Indian community in East Africa was residentially and socially segregated (Bachu 1985). To these Asians, the black population was mainly encountered as lower paid workers in shops and factories or as domestic servants. For young people, who have gone to school with black people of similar age and have made friends with them and who identify common experiences of racism and political stance, linkages between blacks and young Asians are stronger.

On the whole, however, the attitude of the young Asians in my fieldwork toward black people seemed to be more ambiguous than those toward whites. In particular, there was uncertainty over whether black people were an 'enemy' and held prejudiced views of South-Asians. Disagreement also existed over whether experiences of racism (and colonialism) are enough to link South-Asians and blacks (see also Baumann 1996). Although the multiculturalist and anti-racist movements have commonly used the term 'black' generically, to describe alternative ethnicities, and studies such as Alexander's (1996) assert that Asians are often seen as part of the UK 'black community' by young black people, most of the Indians and Pakistanis encountered during fieldwork said they would not describe themselves as black. They related to black people's experiences only in a superficial way. As Jamal pointed out: "... it's more the middle-classes with all their PC and that shit who think we're all black, but we're not the

same as them". There was a class bias to this, with the individuals from middle-class backgrounds and further educated, less likely to identify as black. Khulsoom, who had had black boyfriends similarly commented "I think when people call Asians black, what they mean is that they aren't white. But really were different from black people". However, there was a number of the participants who declared that they would call themselves 'black'. Social position, education and personal linkages played a role in this determination. Compared with this, only a minority of the middle-income or further educated youngsters said they might consider themselves included in the category 'black'. Some of these categorised themselves as 'black' solely in the political sense of not being white, others pointed to colonialism and racial prejudice as a unifying factor. Only a few believed they shared similar life experiences with black Britons. This was compared with a majority of the Bangladeshi boys, who categorised themselves as 'black'. This is an interesting association, for Eade and associates (1997:151) note socio-economic similarities between the black-Caribbean and the Bangladeshi population in the UK. They suggest that Bangladeshis in the UK "...have more in common with black-Caribbean residents than with Indians and Pakistanis".

The sentiments of the Bangladeshi females were somewhat different to the males. Their responses also shed some light on why Bangali boys may be more likely to identify themselves as black. Within the multiculturalist, anti-racist and feminist movements, the term 'black women' is used more often than 'black men' to include Asians. For example, Parmar (1982) uses the expression 'black' women frequently when referring to Asian women, and Mehra (1996:79) notes that he uses the term "... to describe women who share similar experiences of belonging to ethnic minority groups in the UK". This political sense of black is implied in that Raj, for example, referred to himself as 'black' and appropriated black sub-cultural styles, but, as we noted earlier, would be unhappy if his sister kept a black boyfriend, and would not have a black girlfriend himself. Although the experience of being non-white may be broadly similar at one level, the female participants were much less likely to see themselves as 'black', even

politically, and were less likely to relate to a notion of shared 'black people's experiences' than males. This can be linked to the fact that females had less experience of aggressive overt racism than the boys asserted they had. They were also less likely to be involved in the 'culture' of marijuana smoking, as were the majority of young Bangali boys, which was seen by both males and females as an important element of black cultures. In addition, the weak link between 'female' and 'black' was linked to the limited mobility of some young females after school hours, so they had little personal experience of interaction and friendships with black people (which was certainly the case for Bangali girls). That said, for some males, greater understanding and identification with black people was more imaginary than drawn from overt social interaction. Neigar explained how she saw this 'imagined' link between some of the Bangali males in her area and blacks:

Some of the older ones [Bangali males] grew up more with black people, like before at school, but some of them never even said two words to a black person, but they still try and be black ... It's not because they can relate. They would rather be black than Bangali ... Being black is hard, it's cool. Without that they're just a bunch of curry boys.

What is embedded in this statement is an important point, which relates to the perceived lack of a strong counter-positional identity amongst some South-Asians. This is exemplified by a comment made by a young Bangali boy at the youth centre. There was an unofficial rule laid down by the youth leader that music with misogynistic or violent lyrics was not to be played on the stereo-system. On one occasion he removed a tape that had been playing a track in which a drive-by shooting was described in detail. In exasperation over the tape owner's protests, he exclaimed "I don't know why you listen to this stuff", to which Karim, the owner, replied: "It's about us. It's our music. We come from the ghetto too y'know". There were murmurs of agreement from the other boys present.

Many of the young men at the youth club used black street terminology, listened to and identified with black music, and used black stereotypes in everyday conversations, not just within the space of the youth centre.<sup>18</sup> However, ambivalence toward black people remained. Although the young boys took on black sub-cultural styles and often described themselves as black, racist views on black people were sometimes expressed. One example I remember particularly well involved Karim, whom I have documented above as conceptualising his experiences alongside those of blacks, yet on this occasion made particularly strong racist comments about a black character in a programme on the television.

Perceived ethnic differences were sometimes constructed and drawn on, but on other occasions they were ignored and underplayed. The importance of perceived differences between different groups seemed to wax and wane depending on the nature of the situation. For example, in the youth club, compliments were almost never paid openly. Talking on a personal level was almost always done as a 'wind-up', leading to comical banter. In this context, banter relating to racially informed difference was common, although it was not just racial differences that were picked out. As an example, one of the younger white boys was nicknamed 'vanilla-ice' (after the white rap artist) on account of the black/Bangali clothes he often wore. By contrast, his brother, a plump child, was often called fatty; a name with no racial connotations whatsoever. It seems the boys picked the most outstanding feature of whomever they were trying to make fun of. Only in some cases did this have a 'racial' or ethnic connection. At times, it was almost as if they accepted ethnic differences and showed their lack of importance

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<sup>18</sup> Another example of the linkage with black rather than white individuals or groups was the relationship between the boys and the workers at the club. Although there was two Bangali and two white youth-workers, the youth leader told me that he had been placed as leader partly because of his experience and partly because it was felt that the boys would relate with, and respect his authority more, as a black man.

through making fun of them. This was demonstrated in the use of the term 'curry-boys' to describe themselves. Most of the young people in the study agreed that not all references to race by other groups had racist undertones.<sup>19</sup> Physical appearances, sometimes based on ethnic differences and colour are often the most visible markers of difference between individuals, and hence are often used to mark difference. That said, in situations of confrontation, racial differences and prejudices were almost always constructed. For example, when the Afro-Caribbean youth leader had to reprimand one of the youths for repeated misdemeanours, a scuffle broke out in which the language and names thrown at the black youth leader were almost exclusively racially orientated. This was odd because the things being referred to were features the boys had expressed admiration for in the youth-worker. In order to hurt the youth leader, the boys used language that would convey their state of agitation. The intention in the name-calling was to inflict as much hurt as possible, not necessarily because these names were particularly negative or derogatory, but because they were seen to be taboo, as with names carrying racial references. Back (1996) also found this in the racist-name calling he witnessed during his research. He concluded that 'racist'-name calling and supposedly racist language must be examined within the context it is used.

Back (1996) also points to the importance of shared experience in the construction of an individual's ideas about 'race'. This was illustrated at the youth club, in an incident involving Habib, a young boy of 12 years, who went to a predominantly Bangali school in the area. At the

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<sup>19</sup> A further illustration of this was an incident at the youth during a game of basketball. In deciding how to split the group into two teams, one of the two white boys said "let's have Bangalis against whites". The other youth-worker present became angry and reprimanded the boy for being 'racist'. When he tried to explain that he had made this comment as a joke, since there were only two white boys and many more Bangalis, she still maintained this was racist. Speaking later to the white boy and some of the Bangalis who had been present, they commented on the incident, saying that they thought the female youth-worker was the racist one for 'picking' on the Bangali boy who had made the comments.



club, Habib mixed with young Bangalis and occasionally with one or two white kids. On this occasion, Habib made a comment towards an Afro-Caribbean black youth-worker, Marcus, who had started working at the club one evening a week while a replacement worker was found. One day Marcus was playing table-tennis with one of the older boys, during which he jumped and danced around the table as he played. Habib, at an audible level, exclaimed: "Go back to the jungle". Malik, with whom Patrick had been playing, put down his bat, went up to Habib and said: "Marcus is alright, don't let me hear you say that again". Rather than telling off Habib for the use of racist language, the message was that it was not right to use that language on this particular person because of his link with Malik, because Malik felt Marcus was 'alright'. Malik was using this personal link, his shared experience with Marcus, to challenge the racist view Habib held of black people. Thus the self-categorisation of the young Bangali males as 'black', was always contextual, as were relations between the young British Asians and individuals of other 'racial' groups. The nature of the relationship or identification was dependent not only on the social space of interaction and the type of situation (i.e. confrontational, defensive, friendly, and so on), but also on personal linkages between individuals of the same group.

In relation to white racism, most, if not all, of the young participants identified with other social groups, as seen in the incident with the Pakistani shopkeeper. This was the case whether or not they had personal links with individuals in the group. This identification was not just articulated, but practised. This was seen in an incident involving two Somali brothers who had recently moved to an estate near to the youth centre and had started to attend the club in the evenings. Although they had not yet made friends, beyond casual remarks, with any of the Bangali youths, and were not usually included in pool or card games, their membership and presence in the club was tacitly accepted by the Bangali youths. This was seen one evening, when one of the younger boys rushed into the club, telling the older boys that the Somali brothers were in some trouble with a small group of white youths from the estate. Immediately

a small gang, exclusively Bangali, gathered outside the club and set off with the intention of helping the brothers. The white youths were scared off by the arrival of the Bangali gang, so that no one else was involved in fighting. Back at the club, the Somalian Brothers were then included in the pool games and in general conversations. They had been transformed by the incident into fully-fledged friends of the Bangali boys, with the experience of white racism the factor that had led the Bangali boys to identify with them.

In this section I have presented an analysis of the identifications made by the participants with other groups in local areas and other spaces of interaction on the street. In these social spaces one of the factors influencing interaction and identification has been that of the racial composition of spaces. In the youth club and in local areas, participants were part of a group made up mostly of other British Asians. Within these spaces there was a large degree of choice in the interactions made with other social groups. In the next section I explore the influences of, and identifications made within, school and work environments. Here the composition of people is often more racially mixed. Moreover, the values presented are often those of dominant white British social groups.

## **At School and Work**

It is in the school and work environments that individuals from different social groups come most regularly into close contact with each other, often for extended periods of time. The type of identification made in these spaces depends greatly on the particular school or work place, which influences the ethnic make-up of the space and social structure of the establishment (Mirza 1992). Occupational identities are important in giving an individual a sense of self-worth, independence and a position in society. Workplace also informs other people of perceived abilities, social class, and, to some extent, lifestyle choice (as reflected in the type of work performed). This aspect of personal identity starts from an even earlier age. It begins at

school, for example, through the subjects chosen (Head 1997, Erikson 1968). Furthermore, school/college and the workplace are among the most important spaces of social interaction, especially for some young Asian women, who may interact less in other social spaces outside the family home (Mohammad 1999).

### **Preferences in educational and career options**

Expectations of the family and the community are important in determining social interactions and identities created through school and work. Commentators have noted that there are certain professions and subjects of study that are seen, amongst older Asians, as being more prestigious, even more 'suitable', for young Asian men and women (Mohammad 1999). For example, the natural sciences, particularly medicine and pharmacology, are traditionally seen as more prestigious than the arts and social sciences, even for girls. Educational and professional expectations are also gendered. Generally, careers with substantial financial rewards, especially in law, medicine, engineering and the natural sciences are expected for males, whereas careers in caring professions, and those that do not require long hours, are the general expectation for women. This study found that to some extent these culturally specific preferences have persisted even within the younger generation, but there was a belief amongst the young people that this is slowly changing (see Table 5.6).

Yet old prejudices and preferences persist. As an illustration of a common pattern, when I was a new undergraduate at university, I was talking to an older British Asian, male undergraduate. When I told him that I was studying geography, he asked me whether I had got onto the course through clearing. He automatically assumed that geography had not been my first choice. When I asked him to explain why he thought that, he replied that he did not know British Asian people were 'into' geography. The other Asian girl on the geography course, Nita, indicated she had had similar reactions from her relatives and her mother's friends. Their

responses, on hearing she was studying Geography ranged from 'Oh', to 'So you want to be a teacher?'. My mother gave various demonstrations of prejudice against the arts and social sciences. On one occasion this was manifest in her comment that I needed less time to revise for my examinations than my sister, an undergraduate in physics, because geography is "much easier".

**Table 5.6 Percentage of students studying different subjects in higher education, 1994-1995**

COURSE	Black	Indian	Pakistani/ Bangladeshi	Other ethnic	White
Languages/Humanities	10	6	5	12	18
Business & Finance	3	2	2	5	9
Engineering & Technology	3	2	2	3	3
Sciences	47	46	53	44	39
Medicine	8	12	10	9	7
Education	4	3	4	4	6
Social sciences	17	23	18	17	13
Combined & general	9	5	6	6	5
All students (thousands)	23	23	13	23	581

United Kingdom home students studying full-time or on sandwich courses 1994-1995  
*Source: Social focus on Ethnic Minorities, 1996, Office for National Statistics*

## **Conflicting values at work and school**

Cultural codes of behaviour and religious directives have an impact on the identity formations of young people at work, as well as at school. Most of the participants of this study had numerous small, but significant, restrictions placed on their social interactions by their families, based on cultural and religious dictates. As I have already suggested in the previous chapter, this was especially true for females. Among these restrictions were not being able to attend mixed swimming classes, sometimes not being permitted to go on overnight school trips, wearing jogging pants instead of gym skirts in physical education classes, and so on. A number of the girls mentioned they had parental restrictions on what clothes they were permitted to wear inside and outside the home, and this was a source of angst for them. Clothing restrictions dictated the fashions they could join-in and what type of image they might convey to peers. This was felt to have a significant effect on their lives, because, as Danesi (1994:48) notes, fashion is a strong ideological marker, with "... clothing texts defining clique values and modes of behaviour". Mohammed (1999) also reports that, for some of the young Muslim women in her study, lack of choice over clothes worn outside the home caused them angst. At an age when peer pressure, alongside need for a sense of belonging are particularly acute, these small details can add to long-lived feelings of exclusion (see also Head 1997, Ghuman 1999). What might be considered 'harmless' norms of behaviour amongst the majority groups, when not in accordance with the cultural codes of a minority group, can have an unsettling effect on minority members. Shazia provided a clear statement on this, when indicating that she disliked Christmas. Before moving to her present school, her class had been predominantly white:

... they [her classmates] were always going on about what they were getting for Christmas and they'd ask me, then they'd go "oh yeah, you don't believe in Christmas" ... There was a special Christmas dinner every year, and even everyone who didn't normally have school dinners would have it that day, and me and some of the others would be sitting there having our packed lunch [...] It wasn't Halal, was it!

Shazia's experience of Christmas is a strong example of how everyday practices of the dominant social group can induce feelings of 'difference' and exclusion. In this case, Shazia is

twice excluded, one because she does not 'believe in Christmas' and, two, because she cannot take part in celebrations, even symbolically, due to her religious dietary needs.

The British school system, regardless of claims of multicultural education, remains a vehicle for the transmission of British, Christian, middle-class, male, values (Weiner 1985, Tronya and Williams 1986, Tronya 1993, Baumann 1996, Ghuman 1999). These can often be at odds with the cultural codes of family, religion and even peer group sub-culture (Drury 1991). A striking illustration of this comes from my own childhood. At home one day I sang a song I had learnt in junior school. It included the words 'Jesus, son of god'. On hearing these words, my mother became angry and told me that as Muslims we did not believe Jesus was the son of god. She asked me not to sing it again. The next time we had to sing the hymn in school I got in trouble with the teacher for not joining in. Although she accepted my explanation, thereafter, every time we sang the hymn, my class-mates would stare at my silent face. I later learnt to move my mouth, forming word-like shapes, to avoid attention, but the burning embarrassment, almost shame, and sense of difference returned every time the hymn was sung.

Codes of behaviour set down by the imagined ethnic community or the family had an effect on young people's choice of peer group. Choice of friends and the ability to join in after-school activities was important for successful social interaction in school. Thus, when Neigar started senior school, she made close friends with a white British girl, but could not sustain the friendship:

... Nicola was always saying that I should come round and that, but my mum didn't want me to go. I told her that she could come too, like Leanne's mum and Julie's goes round, but I knew she wouldn't, and she didn't want me hanging round there either ... now she's [Nicola] best friends with Leanne.

Neigar felt 'different' because her mother did not want a relationship with her friend's mother. Neigar saw this, as well being able to spend time at each others' homes, as an important aspect of the friendship.

When friendships and social interactions with youngsters from other groups are affected, so will the understanding of, and identification with, others. Through my fieldwork I found young British Asians, most especially females and those of working-class background, were unlikely to have close friends from racial backgrounds other than their own. As other studies have found, it was much more likely, even for second and third generation British Asians, to have the majority of their friends from the same racial group. This was often because they were understanding of, and accepted, each other's lifestyle and cultural background (e.g. Modood et al 1994). Shamista, for example, said that she had far more British Asian friends than white or black friends. She explained that this was because they understood her better: "... it don't matter if, like, Shazia, her dad sometimes lets her go out after school, but she knows why I can't and she doesn't think I'm sad or anything". In some cases, friendships with those from other ethnic groups were frowned upon or monitored by young Asians in the workplace or educational institution. In the same way that certain lifestyle choices were seen as more 'suitable' for a young Asian person, the choice of peers was also (loosely) regulated by cultural codes of practice set in place by young people themselves. During my years as an undergraduate I was often chastised and gossiped about by some of the young British Asian people I knew at university for being 'too friendly' with people from other racial groups. One particular incident went beyond hurtful to intimidating. It took place in a lift in the student union building. Some friends from my course had just left the lift and I was travelling on to a different floor. A British Asian male I did not know and his friend, the only other people in the lift, asked me if I was a Muslim. I answered that I was, to which the first male said something like 'then why are you cavorting around shamelessly with these white boys'. His tone, alongside his and his friend's manner, were especially aggressive.

At the same time, it is not just the cultural community that influences the way young people interact and identify. The dominant values present within an institution also play a role

in the construction of difference. Also contributing to the social relations of these spaces is the presence of stereotype of British Asians.

### **Institutionalised stereotypes**

Although many studies have researched the way British Asian youngsters may face discrimination at school and in the job market, this has normally been undertaken in a statistical manner, highlighting levels of remuneration and positions in the labour market relative to qualifications (e.g. see Brown 1984, Department of Education and Science 1985, Brennan and McGreever 1987, Drew and associates 1992, Jones 1993). Little qualitative work has been done on socio-structural norms of work/school establishments, or how the expectations managers, teachers and others in work or education environments impact on the youngsters' identities. Yet these social spaces have been pointed to as particularly important in the negotiation of identity (Mac an Ghaill 1988, Bowlby et al 1998). Discourses on Asian students' abilities and characteristics abound both in schools and in popular imagery (German 1996). Youngsters in the study were acutely aware that some of their teachers and work superiors held particular views on Asians. They felt these were based mainly on stereotypical assumptions. Mohammed, who worked at an investment bank, felt his white manager observed and accorded much of his behaviour to his South-Asian origins. For instance, when Mohammed asked that he no longer be scheduled to do the 'grave-yard' shift, from eight in the evening till three in the morning, his manager said he understood Mohammed would have to go home to be with his family. The bias inherent in this explanation was noted by Mohammed, who observed that when his white colleagues showed a preference for not working the grave-yard shift, this was taken to be because of its inconvenient hours. In Mohammed's view, whatever he did reinforced his manager's stereotypical view of British Asians. When he did something that contradicted this stereotype it was ignored or quickly forgotten. This had a clear impact on his behaviour. He gave the example of an evening after work when he and the rest of the work team went for a



drink. At the end of the evening, a few of them, including the manager, shared a cab home. Mohammed's house was the first stop. But because Mohammed felt his manager already held a stereotypical view of him, he did not want him to know where he lived. He felt that if it came to his manager's attention that he lived in a council house on Drummond Street, Euston, the stereotype of a 'Bangali b-boy', would be reinforced so strongly that it would prevent his career from moving forward. He asked to be dropped off some distance from his home, under the pretext that he wanted to buy some water from the 24 hour shop on his way home.

Based on the evidence derived during this study and from others (e.g. see Wacquant's 1995 work on the stigmatisation of urban spaces), Mohammed's instincts are not unfounded. Evidence shows that employers, and employees, often hold tightly structured views regarding the kind of person that should be employed in a particular job (Brown 1992). Often this does not include those from minority groups (e.g. Brown 1987, Brah 1994). For one of the youngsters involved in this study, the realisation that ethnic minorities did not fit the image of the ideal candidate for some employers, in part led to her decision to change the course of her career. Aliya, a law graduate, felt that as a British Asian female her chances of accessing Bar School, obtaining a pupillage and then practising within a chamber, were significantly less than for a white male, in an already highly competitive, and some would argue highly prejudiced, profession. She has since left the Law. Teachers and careers advisors too, have been noted for prejudice in the way they see career options for ethnic groups and genders. This can have far-reaching effects on education and career options (Cross et al 1990, Bowlby et al 1998, Brah 1994, German 1996). Neigar exemplified an underlying sense of grievance over the way institutions respond, which typifies views identified during fieldwork. She had skipped school on a few occasions, mainly missing maths lessons. She commented that she skipped lessons because she did not like her maths teacher who, she felt, had little confidence in her future: "... it doesn't matter whether she thinks I'm thick or not, she's probably thinking, 'why bother, she's only gonna go and get married when she's 16' ". Here, we see how race, class and gender are inextricably

linked in defining the 'other', as well as potentially perpetuating inequalities. As another example, Aliya, who has a degree in Law, reported that at the age of 17, her teacher at school encouraged her to think about working as a Hindi-English translator, even though she knew that Aliya's ambition was to become a Barrister.

I got my Hindi GCSE while doing my first year of my A-levels ... I mean, I already had nine GCSEs from the year before but doing Hindi was quite easy so I just thought I'd get that as well ... She knew I wanted to be a human rights lawyer that's why I was doing A-level Law, but she kept on going on about how I could do translation services, like working for the council or something. She even told my parents that on open evening. It's like she really didn't think I could do it.

In this case, the teacher's perception of Aliya's ability may have had little to do with the intersection of race and gender, but may have been based on past academic performance. However, the alternative career she chose for Aliya indicates that her perception was influenced by Aliya's perceived 'ethnicity'. She did after all have nine GCSE's other than Hindi.

The expectations of teachers can have a very definite impact on the way youngsters see themselves, their capabilities and their potential choices for the future. At school, studying for my GCSE English, I was placed in the bottom of three sets. Despite my protests, and although I found the work easy, I remained in the bottom set. During this period of time, I entered a national creative-writing competition. It was not associated with the school, but it was necessary to get a teacher to confirm authorship. On asking my English teacher to sign the form, she told me not to bother entering the competition, as I would not win anything, even though she had not even read the article. For a few days I agonised over whether I should submit the piece or not, whether I was, as I believed, good at writing. This teacher, I believe, had put together the facts that I was what they termed a 'disruptive child', that I came from a single parent, financially struggling family, and that I was Asian, and had come up with the conclusion that my English skills were of a poor standard. At the time, my opinions of my ability were very much effected by her perception of me.

Labelling also comes from peers in the school and work environments. Both coercion and exclusion were found during fieldwork as responses to those who were felt by a group to be transgressing (sub)cultural codes of behaviour. At the youth centre, for example, Raju, a young Bangali boy, was subtly excluded from the pool tournament on one occasion. On hearing one of the boys taunting him and name-calling, he told me that two of the boys thought he was 'sucking-up' to teachers at school, so they effectively barred him from the peer group.

... I don't really want to be part of their group anymore. I don't care. I'd much rather get my work done and get a decent job when I leave school, or even, like Ms Ritcher says, maybe even go to college. Who wants to hang about with them losers and end-up being a curry-boy?

He found it particularly difficult in school because of different expectations placed on him by his family, especially his older brother, and some in his peer group. But it was not so much that he was getting good grades and handing in homework, but that a teacher, a young white female, had been seen to encourage him. Coupled with the fact that he was not one of the leaders of the group, this had led to his exclusion from group activities.

As illustrated in previous sections, in many but not all cases, the identifications sought by young Asians interacting in these spaces were 'conformist' (or as Ghuman 1999 calls it, compromise change),<sup>20</sup> rather than 'confrontational', because of the social make-up and power relations of the spaces. In school, and especially at the workplace, the most common

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<sup>20</sup> Ghuman (1999) notes that young British-Asians, especially females, use a strategy of 'compartmentalisation' to cope with different social situations. He argues that without deploying this strategy, they could suffer from 'identity diffusion', loss of self-esteem and develop psychological disorders. Although I wholeheartedly disagree with Ghuman's terminology 'compartmentalisation' and the notion that the youngsters might suffer psychological trauma, the evidence from the study shows that patterns of identification can change in order to achieve desired objectives, as seen with 'conforming' within a social space.

identification category was conformity. However, situations arose when confrontational identifications were made. This tactic was less commonly used by the young people than 'confirmation', because its antagonistic nature was not suited for a social space they had to interact in on a regular basis, which may have an important effect on their future. On the occasions when confrontational identifications occurred, what most distinguished situations was that a youth had 'nothing to lose' (for example in the night-club incident), in terms of creating a negative image that would affect job security, career or education. Confrontational or counter-positional identity configurations were often exhibited in extreme cases when the user felt there could not be any other successful course of action. This was used as a 'shock-tactic'. Khulsoom recalled a situation when she overheard a group of students on her undergraduate course in the library discussing the 'oppressed and down-trodden' plight of Asian girls, both in the third world and elsewhere. As she sat down at their table, they asked her if she was going to have an arranged marriage. She told me she found it incredible that university students should be so ill-informed. She had had the same conversation with other people, who, after an explanation of the differences of 'arranged', 'introduced' and 'approved' marriages and so on, were none-the-wiser. On this occasion she decided to turn it into a joke instead. She told them that she had married at 18 years, to man of whom she had previously only seen a picture. As they started to ask her questions, she could tell they had not realised she was joking. To shock them further into examining their misconceptions, she finished her story by adding that the night after the wedding she was made to hang out the sheets to show she had been a virgin before the wedding night. Telling so exaggerated a story, she hoped the listeners would realise how ridiculous their stereotypical image was. This confrontational strategy helped her to negotiate a situation she had found, from previous experience, difficult and embarrassing. It was partly a defensive/offensive tactic, against the labelling practices of the group, and part shock tactic to challenge their perceptions.

Far more common though were conformist strategies of identification, where an individual tried, to some extent, to 'fit in' with cultural codes in an establishment. Three of the male participants in full-time, white-collar jobs, commented that there was a strong drinking culture at work. For Tariq, "... it's not just about enjoying a drink or not ... [the culture] is so strong that if you are not part of it you are seen as an outsider and you have to work even harder to be accepted". Jamal gave in to such pressure and started drinking with work friends:

I did give in and start drinking, not totally, but I guess mainly because of the pressure. It wasn't like they were forcing drinks down my throat. Just every time we went to the pub, or just during lunch-time, if someone asked me what I was having ... it would draw attention to the fact that I didn't drink like they did, and that I wasn't really one of them. I know that there were others who weren't really like them either, but because they'd all get pissed together. And, yeah, there were other people who didn't drink, like Tom, but it didn't matter so much because he's white.

For these men, within the cultures of their workplaces, the fact they did not drink drew attention to their different colour and religion, thereby allowing peers to elaborate on the notion of difference. The response to this was to conform to a workplace norm. Tina also used the 'conformation' strategy at work by down-playing ethnic identifications she felt were expected of her. After she started working at Harrods, she found that there was another Asian girl working on the same floor whose behaviour, she felt, served to reinforce the stereotype of Asian women as a "giggly... [a] push-over, and a bit slow". Although she neither particularly disliked nor liked this girl, because she felt she would be 'guilty by association', she maintained a distance from her. Tina's perception that "they think we're all the same", was brought out in various discussions. During my time working at a DIY store with Divia this message was also implicit in management actions. At this store, after an initial period of training, a new recruit is placed with a 'mentor', to whom questions about products or customer enquiries that cannot be handled by oneself should be directed. This mentor was responsible for seeing that a new employee 'settles in comfortably with the team'. Out of a team of mentors including three white males, two white females, and one Asian male, the manager in charge of recruits placed me with

Divia, the only other British Asian female. This was unlikely to be a co-incidence, since there was little other reason why he would have placed us together. We had an age gap of five years, which meant she was neither the closest to me in age, nor was she one of the more senior workers. The other mentors were also not 'over-loaded' with other responsibilities.

All the employed young people involved in the fieldwork felt stereotypes of young British Asians were active in their workplaces. A common view, especially amongst those in white-collar jobs, was that the best course of action was to try to challenge these stereotypes, or 'just not live up to them' by conforming with the dominant values of the space, in order to move forward in their jobs. During my time working at MacDonalds, the three Bangali boys I worked with who had been at the youth centre, who there exhibited an exaggerated Bangali ethnicity, spoke using a very different vocabulary and accent when the white manager was present. Here they did not use the creolised 'bangl-aise' they spoke to each other in the youth club or on the street. Even though other Bangalis were present, it was acceptable to play a 'westernised identity' to help maintain job security. When the white manager was not present, or when the boys were upstairs in the common room, it was a different matter. Almost as if they were compensating for having to put on a show of westernised identity, they would exaggerate their Bangali ethnicity and peer linkages. Even with a young black shift manager, these Bangali boys toned-down their ethnicity while at work. Occasionally, they would use creolised-black language, as if to show that while they respected his authority, this black shift manager should not forget they were from a similar social group to him. This pattern supports Hewitt's (1986) point that language is one of the most important boundary markers; so being able to speak or understand a particular language or dialect is important for inclusion within a group boundary. The use of creolised Bangali and black street language in front of the black shift manager was practised by the Bangali workers as if to mark Winston (the manager) within their group boundary. These Bangali workers revealed peer linkages more with the black shift manager than the white manager, as if believing the black shift manager was less likely to form a

negative view of them on the basis of the peers with whom they identified. Illustrating this difference in approach, on an occasion when it was quiet in the restaurant, one of the boys changed the radio station and turned up the music. Another responded by saying, "You better turn it down, you're already in enough trouble", to which the other replied, "Relax man, it's Winston on shift. He's cool, like us". My experience working under Winston and the white shift manager was that they were equally strict. Furthermore, Winston had never talked about his personal life. Yet the boys, because of Winston's colour, concluded that they shared an experience or identity that rendered Winston more likely to be lenient than the white shift manager. When the white shift manager reprimanded one of the Bangali boys, they would take it more offensively than when Winston reprimanded them. In private they would often claim the white manager's reprimands were unfounded, while quietly accepting those made by Winston. The boys felt the white manager generally held a negative image of them, based on notions of ethnicity, whereas they felt Winston was more likely to judge them as individuals. That the white manager possibly did hold negative views of the Bangali boys became evident to me in a number of ways. For one, Bangali and Somali workers were most likely to be put on kitchen duty (generally considered lower in status and less appealing work) than on the tills. Perhaps most evidently it became apparent when there was money missing from one of the tills. Since the last time the till had been cashed-up and counted, two people had been assigned to it. Mustafa had been on the last shift, and a new worker, an East European female, had been on the previous shift. While I was cashing-up my till with the white manager, I asked if the money had been found. He replied that it had not and went on to say: "I know who's stolen it, and he better watch out, because I'm on to him. If he thinks that this is the last he's going to hear of it, he's wrong. I will not tolerate this in my restaurant". Although Mustafa was not mentioned by name, it was clear the manager believed he had taken the money. This was despite the fact that Mustafa had worked there, on and off, for nearly nine months without his till ever being short of a large sum of money. It was also quite common for there to be a mistake by tellers in giving back excess change to customers, especially owing to confusion over the denomination of paper money handed to them, or as a result of errors in

entering into the till the correct amount given. It was regarded by workers as not uncommon, especially with a new recruit, for certain customers to confuse the teller, and trick them into handing over more change. On two occasions in my first two weeks at MacDonald's, my till was short but the white shift manager and a new Pakistani manager merely told me to be more careful; although they did note the incidents, as was mandatory, in the records. I felt that I was being treated more leniently than other workers, firstly, because I am female and, secondly, because of the managers' perception of my being less 'ethnic', and therefore less likely to commit deviant acts. This perceived link between young ethnic minorities, especially males, and deviancy, has been asserted by a number of commentators (e.g. Gilroy 1987). The Bangali workers at MacDonalds were aware of this linkage by some commentators; hence to keep their jobs they employed the strategy of de-ethnicising.

## **Identities on National and Global Scales**

### **Populist discourses**

Ethnicity, commentators have noted, is a characteristic of self-ascription and ascription by others (Barth 1968, Allemann-Ghionda 1997). Similarly, identifications are partly guided by the perceptions of others (e.g. Tajfel 1978, Head 1997). 'Ascription by others', as we have seen already, plays an important role in the way young people identify with other individuals and groups, throughout the spaces of interaction. Much work in sociology and psychology underlines the relationship between 'social positioning' and personal and group identity (e.g. Breakwell 1986, Hogg and Abrams 1988, Head 1997). For group identity amongst young Asians, discourses used by majority groups impacted on the way they saw themselves in the context of wider British society, and on a European and global level. The young people involved in the fieldwork were firmly of the belief that views held by the majority of white, and



black, British people concerning Asians were at the least ill-informed, and often derogatory. The focus of knowledge, they felt, has always been on misrepresented cultural traditions, such as marriage and dowry systems. Other studies echo this finding. Lyon (1997:101) illustrates this point by quoting an interviewee from her British Asian research group as saying: "The only thing English people know about Asians is that they have arranged marriages and they are usually wrong about what they know". Neigar expressed similar sentiments:

... they always talk about arranged marriages! Right, yeah, of course it used to happen, still does in some places, but it's like this movie. I saw a movie last week. It was in London, and all the characters wore those round hats and had really strong British accents and drank tea all the time and said things like, 'oh, rather, jolly good old chap'. And that's it though! It's just like what English people think of us, all the old stuff that used to happen years ago, some of it that weren't even true.

One evening at the youth club watching *East Enders* and talking about television programmes in general, a discussion started amongst half a dozen Bangali boys in the TV corner. Part of the conversation went like this:

**Malik:** "... but, how come they *always* have the Asians as shop keepers"

**Karim:** "Yeah, I was watching *The Simpsons*, that man, whassisanme?- Appu! That's it! At the quickie mart, yeah, and *East Enders* 'n all, *Sanjay!*".

Laughing they all break out into Indian accents, doing impressions of some of the Asian characters in *East Enders*. The black youth leader comes over:

**Youth leader:** "At least they don't have you down as thieves and muggers". [referring to black representations on television]

**Karim:** "Nah, what you saying! I was watching *The Bill* the other day. They had this whole thing, where first they all thought it was the black guy, then it turns out it was the English one the whole time, except no-one believed him till the end".

**Bosha:** [interrupting] "Yeah, they got loadsa black people on TV, like that man that does the news".

**Youth leader:** "You mean Trevor McDonald. Yeah, but they've got Asian news readers as well".

**Karim:** "More like Asian rejects. They don't talk like Asians, they just look brown on the outside".

[Everybody laughs.]

There are important points to note from this short conversation. The boys are aware of the representations of their own ethnic groups on television, and of those of other ethnic groups, and judge the positioning of Asians on television not only compared with whites but also relative to other ethnic groups. The second point, one which we have encountered in other contexts, is that, in referring to Asian news presenters as 'brown on the outside', the yard-stick of 'Asianness' used by these boys judged Asian news presenters as 'not Asian'. What is intimated is that they have only been employed in that role because of their de-ethnicised identity; they are not really Asian except in that they are brown-skinned.

Examples like the two above point to a sense that Asians have little control of over media and popular representations of themselves. This is an important point because a group's autonomy is fundamental to its positive self-conception. As Thomas (1996:179) notes: "An identifiable group of people has group autonomy when its members are generally regarded by others not belonging to the group as the foremost interpreters of their own historical-cultural traditions ... of who we [they] are, ... desires, aims, values, beliefs, and so on". Comparing Jews and blacks, Thomas suggests that one reason why Jews have such a strong, 'successful' sense of identity is because of their group autonomy. For Thomas, a large part of having group autonomy is the 'narrative' associated with the group. He asserts that Jews have a strong group narrative, which is intimately linked and authorised by Christianity through the Old Testament. Although Thomas claims that blacks do not have a narrative, for the black diaspora in the UK and North America, this is not strictly true. One of the strongest black narratives has been the history of slavery (Segal 1995). Furthermore, through successes in certain industries, such as academia, music and sport, blacks are actively unfolding their own narrative. On the contrary for Asians, of current group narratives one is strongly tied to a colonialism and is still largely seen through the eyes of (former) colonists. What there was of the historical South-Asian narrative was disrupted through the partitioning of India. Another current narrative, as we have

seen, is held by most Asians to be a misrepresentation of themselves. Waters (1990) similarly points out that in the United States the white majority control the way discourses of ethnic identities are constructed, while most other ethnic groups do not have a choice in the perception, and *hence creation*, of their own identity. This lack of autonomy for Asian identities can be illustrated by recent comments in the popular media and in academic circles to the effect that, at the moment, it is 'trendy' to be Asian (e.g. see *Time Out Special issue: Black and White issues*, 24 November 1999, and BBC Music news online at [www.bbc.co.uk/radio1/news/music/991199](http://www.bbc.co.uk/radio1/news/music/991199), 25 November 1999). Just to be seen with an Asian on your arm is also apparently 'trendy' (e.g. see 'Asian babes are the new fantasy for Nineties man', Simhon 1998). These comments, referring to the recent fashionable status of Asians in Britain, raise two interrelated issues: (1) are Asians really considered to be 'trendy'; and, (2) who dictates whether they are thought of as 'trendy' or not? Firstly, whether you are considered a trendy Asian depends on who you are, and which social spaces are referred to. It has recently become fashionable to be a 'trendy Asian', especially in spaces where Asians have become trend-setters and maintainers, such as some sections of the music industry. But I contest that it is more generally fashionable to be of Asian origin. Particular lifestyles and identities may be considered trendy, but I doubt seriously this would be the way most young Asians are seen. Secondly, and more importantly, who decides whether British Asians are projected as being trendy or not? It certainly is not British Asians themselves, or doubtless they would have chosen to avoid prejudice and racism by making themselves trendy a long time ago. What appears to be occurring is the appropriation of symbols of Asian cultures for the ever-hungry consumer market. It has become fashionable to wear a bindi on the forehead or mehndi (henna) designs on hands, as long as this does not signify membership of the original cultural frameworks within which these symbols were developed. If an Asian person walks down the road wearing a bindi on her forehead, it would most likely be seen as a signification of an 'ethnic' Asian identity, which commentators note is not tolerated by majority groups in the public sphere (e.g. Modood et al 1994). For the white youngster, these signifiers have an all-

together different meaning. The appropriation of ethnic symbols is not an indication of acceptance of the tradition or cultural values signified, but, as Hebdige (1979) asserts, is 'subcultural bricolage', whereby symbols are appropriated from different places and used together in order to generate new meanings independent of the original signification. Bachu (1993) believes this commodification of Asian cultural styles can be empowering for Asians, but only *if they are in control of images produced for them*. She believes this is happening, and gives the example of the media where she purports that there are significant numbers of Asians involved in knowledge and image production (Ross 1996 and Alibhai-Brown 1998 contest this view). Yet Bachu contradicts herself elsewhere in the same paper; for in referring to publications by Asian female writers, she notes that:

[Asian female writers] ... tend to publish works that either fit 'the passive/victim' stereotype of the 'between and betwixt identity crisis/cultural confrontational/desire to return to homeland' models. Asian women find it easier to find publishers if they fit their writings into these models. There is a tacit encouragement for this type of writings. (1993:104).

Other studies echo this assertion (e.g. Bald 1991). Bachu also notes that publications by black female writers address a wider range of issues, and tend to represent blacks as being in control of their lives. In the academic arena too, until very recently, Asian women were not in control of the discourses created about themselves. As one illustration, Pratibha Parmar (1982) noted the way in which British Asian women were seen was determined by 'racist patriarchal ideology' based on popular ideas about Asian sexuality/femininity. She (1982:238) writes that:

In the work of authors such as Verity Khan, we can find a sociology of Asian women which reproduces common sense ideas about their passivity, the role of their husbands and religious rules. What these authors fail to do, however, is to look seriously at the ways in which the everyday and institutional racisms which permeate British society affect the position of Asian women.

Indeed, much of the literature paints Asian women as domiciled, and comments on the 'patriarchal cultural practices' of South-Asian cultures.

As important as the influence of 'populist' discourses on the self-conception of young British Asians is their position in imaginings of nationhood. Next I explore more specifically the 'politics of belonging', through the ways young people constructed the notion of 'home'

### **Home and away: Are we really British?**

One of the most important issues that was raised with the participants of the study was the idea of 'home' and where they felt this to be. Here, contextual information gathered in a variety of social spaces is important in revealing the lived experiences, actions and thoughts of young people. These were often contrary to sentiments articulated in response to direct questions about 'home', or territorial identification. This contradiction highlights the very contextual nature of identity and notions of belonging.

Many of the comments made by young people about 'home' to direct questions contradicted other comments they made concerning trips to their parents' country of origin and whether they had a desire to live in their parents' country of origin (see earlier section on 'The myth of return'). Others, in response to direct questions about 'home' said they considered their origins, or 'roots' as it was often referred to, important, but did not think of South-Asia as 'home'. Divia, for example pointed out that: "I want to hang on to my cultural heritage because it's really all we've got left. [...] I'm never going to be fully accepted as being British...and anyway, I've started to realise that I'm more Indian than I thought I was". When pressed to elaborate she said there were aspects of British culture and, importantly, *history*, that her friends and their parents' generation shared, which she could not relate to. The theme in Divia's short comment, her perception that she is not accepted by wider British society, was common in the views of informants. Mohammed, for example, made the point that:

I know that when they [his work colleagues] look at me they don't see a brown British person. All they see is a Paki. It's like that cricket test thing, you're brown so we know you're not going to support England

... I'm not gonna beg them to accept me. If they can't, that's just too bad. Fuck them. I'll take my education and my talents somewhere else.

Young people were quite aware of their lack of inclusion in the imaginings of the nation, and consequently, in some contexts, chose to withhold allegiance to it. Divia's 'realisation of being Indian', for example, seems to be counter-positional to her perceived lack of inclusion as British. However, these expressions were context based. Indeed, information gathered outside questions directly raising the issue of 'home' showed more ambivalence and, more importantly, revealed that feelings of belonging, exclusion and inclusion in the imagined nation were dependent on the network of social relations in a social space. For example, during the Soccer World Cup, I asked Tariq if he would be rooting for England to win. He said he was supporting Brazil because he felt they had the best players, like Ronaldo. He went on to say that he never supports England, always preferring the team they are playing. When I asked why, he said "I feel like a foreigner, so why should I support England and not a foreign team". Although he 'hated' the German team, he would support Germany if they were playing England. When asked whether he thought of himself as British (as opposed to English), the conversation was informative. As it was also lengthy, I have copied below directly from my field-notes:

'No, no way. I hate the English, they have such a bad attitude to everything, they just came over, exploited our people; okay, my parents and their family and generation" He carried on about the way in which the British plundered and 'exploited' India, and then left. He said he would be ashamed to call himself British. I pointed out that perhaps this sentiment had a lot in common with the British POWs asking Japan for an apology and compensation for something that happened so many years ago - something that in an earlier conversation he thought was stupid. He said, however, the difference was that the British still carried on being 'smugly superior' and thinking that they could run the world. He used as an example the current situation in Asia with both Pakistan and India carrying out nuclear tests, and how the USA was doing its usual policing of the world. He got quite heated and said that it really pissed him off that 'they' think that they have the authority to poke their noses into everyone else's business when in fact they were the worst perpetrators. I pointed out that the USA and Britain were different states with different foreign policies. He

said that they were really the same and just fed off each other. He then used the Middle East situation as an example of British and American interference. He sees Britain and the USA as the same and that's why he has an oppositional identity to both of them. It's not a case of being Pakistani, just that of being not-British, not even being not-western, because he talked quite favourably of many European countries (on a recent trip to Amsterdam he expressed he thought that Holland would be a great place to live, that the people are very friendly and unbiased, not racist, and have a healthy attitude to the rest of the world and to the environment), it is just a case of not wanting to associate himself with Britain and all that he believes it stands for.

In his response, Tariq was not referring to whether he thought he was culturally more British or Pakistani. It was a politically informed decision to see himself as 'un-British'. On a different occasion though, the political aspect of national identification resulted in the reverse sentiment (i.e. the demand to be included in the national identity). This occurred during a 'racist' incident that Tariq, myself and a young Iranian male experienced while in the West End of London. Tariq had just parked his car and we were walking away from it when a white, middle-class lady of about 40 years, who was driving a large car, approached them. She asked us if we could move the car forward a bit, so that she could get hers in behind. The Iranian male looked at the road marking and told the lady that if he moved forward he would be in the 'no parking zone'. She asked again, to which he politely replied that he did not want to get a ticket. Tariq suggested that she could park in the next street along, where he had seen free spaces. Seeing we were not going to take the risk and move the car forward, the lady became angry and stormed back to her car shouting: "Why don't you just go back to where you came from". To this Tariq promptly replied, "What, do you mean Doncaster?". In this situation, he proclaimed a belonging to Britain as a resistance strategy, in the same way he had earlier proclaimed himself 'un-British', also as a resistance strategy.

What was evident from the responses and contextual information gathered in the study, but I find missing from many accounts, is a difference between identifying with a nation or

macro-group and the place that is felt to be 'home'. Some of the young people, although reluctant to think of South-Asia as home, were equally reluctant to call themselves British. Some felt that to be British would be to deny their South-Asian origins. A few felt the history of British colonial rule in South-Asia prevented them from identifying themselves as British. Yet others felt that they could not call themselves British because other people did not see them as British. However, for many of these youngsters, who were born and brought up in the UK, Britain was definitely 'home'. To overcome this paradox, some utilised the phrase 'British Asian' and others said they were Asians living in Britain. However, what was consistent with all the young people, and consistent with the results of other studies, was that none, at any time-space, said they were 'English'. Although many recognised regional differences between British Asians, the word 'English' seemed imbued with connotations of white Anglo-Saxon middle-class origins. That said, during the fieldwork a small number of the young British Asians were identified who found it difficult to associate their identities with a particular nation. The issue was more complicated than whether they were British as opposed to Pakistani or Indian or Bangladeshi. In part this arose because the white-British did not see them (Asians) as British. This raised barriers to counting themselves as part of a group or nation that did not want them. This sentiment seemed quite universal amongst these young people. As Mohammed suddenly exclaimed during a conversation with a small peer group of young British Asians and young black Britons:

Every-one keeps on going on about how we should demand to be called British as well, but are we really British? I mean, as we have seen from this conversation we think differently from white [British] people. Would a group of white [British] people be sitting here having this conversation right now?

Ambivalent feelings about the location of 'home' were apparent in comments made by the young people about trips to their/their parents' country of origin. While a few who had spent time in their/parents' country of origin asserted that they had not identified with the people or



with the place. The contextual nature of identification was apparent amongst those who had spent lengths of time in countries other than that of their/parents' origin. Jamal, for example, had recently spent a year working in the USA and had returned to the UK with experiences that had re-informed the way he perceived himself. The following are, again, extracts taken directly from my field notes.

He [Jamal] said that when he started out in NY that he wondered how people would see him ethnically. He was aware that there is a large Indian/Pakistani population in NY but didn't know how they were seen by other Americans, for example maybe in the same way Hispanics are seen. [...] He said that it soon became apparent, at least in his work place, that his colleagues saw him very firmly as British. His colouring didn't seem to make any difference because no-one even mentioned his South-Asian origins when people would ask him where he was from. He said that he did this himself. He said that slowly he stopped referring to himself as Bangali, or qualifying himself as being 'from England but originally from Bangladesh' when Americans asked where he was from. He said that he grew more and more comfortable with the idea of being 'just British'.

While out of the U.K, Jay found it easier to identify himself as 'British'. Tariq also noted that his experience abroad, meeting people from other countries, had led him to conclude that he was "... British, or at least more British than anything else". During his travels to other countries, he frequently met young people from other countries who were travelling. When conversations about each person's or each group's country of residence took place, he felt comfortable with seeing himself as British and talking about 'British' culture and things British. However, if there were white Britons present, he would defer to their views or accounts, saying he felt somewhat uncomfortable talking about 'Britain' in an authoritative fashion. His 'British identity' was subject to contextual aberrations even when in the UK. He explained that in conversations with people from other countries, if Britons (or Britain) were (was) the subject of criticism, for example in conversations about attitudes to the environment, or about the European Union, he felt happy to join in and to confirm as well as defend Britain's position. He felt that such criticism was not directed at him in any way. However, when in the UK, if the Pakistani

diaspora was criticised, such as when a recent case of benefit fraud made the national news, or Pakistan was criticised, for example over the nuclear testing or conflict with India, he felt embarrassed and defensive. This was not so much because he thought of himself as Pakistani, but because he perceived that others, especially white British, saw him this way.

This ambivalence towards territorial belonging was a common strand in the behaviour and articulations of the young people involved in the fieldwork. For many of those who called themselves British, this seemed to be a thought-out action, operationalised in order to challenge popular conceptions of 'Britishness'. Whereas for those who saw themselves as Pakistani, Bangali or Indian, this self-definition was in part a counter-positional stance against a nation they saw as not accepting of them. They saw their identifications arising only partly from the cultural influence of their parents or their cultural community. Furthermore, whether or not these young Asians saw themselves as British depended greatly on spaces of social interaction. At different times and with different groups and individuals, they presented their different ethnicities. This was also dependent on personal experiences and therefore varied from individual to individual. But mostly clearly, labelling oneself 'British' was not done with confidence, rather it was precarious and provisional. I will end this section with some notes I made in my field book during the second year of fieldwork. They highlight the ways in which feelings of belonging may be constructed through experience, deliberation and context:

I can never feel like I am totally British, maybe I am in a passive way but not in a political way, and not in the way that I think that most white British people would describe 'British'. So it's an alternative form, a self described form of Britishness that may not be accepted by other people who are white 'British'. I may see myself as contemporarily British, because I can relate to the present definition of Britishness. However, It is always apparent to me that my history is not British. When the TV shows pictures of people working down the mines in the early 1920s or whenever, or period dramas, I can't relate to it. They are totally alien to me. Not just because it is difficult to relate to a time that is not yours but because neither the time nor the culture nor the

territory was mine or my kin's. I don't feel like it was part of my past. Maybe this is because I am not ever completely British, I wasn't British before, and have only become British.

This lack of clear definition probably plays an interesting role in identity and allegiance. In one way it makes me realise that it is not important where your territory is that you come from, and where you live, etc., that it should really be unimportant, that these boundaries are artificial and that we all inhabit the same space. In a way it gives a sense of freedom to choose. On the other hand, especially in times of conflict, you realise that there are certain things about Britishness that you are not willing to internalise or associate yourself with, like imperialistic attitudes, lager louts and football hooliganism. In times of war or conflict between Britain and another country, if the other is a third world country, I always feel empathy and pledge my support, not for Britain, but for the third world country because it is an underdog of neo-imperialism. That was me and the country that my parents came from, they experienced this too. Britain plays a role in screwing up the third world. This causes an alienation inside myself if I consider myself British. I try to avoid talking about it with 'white British' people, lest my views are seen as being a result, not of my rational thinking that 'this is wrong', but because I am a foreigner just like the others. The feeling of alienation also causes a disruption. It makes you partly hate where you are - that Britain is such an imperialistic country - and also causes a reassessment of whether you want to be British. In a way this is a freedom from the stupidity of nationalism, not feeling bound to the territory allows you to make much more rational decisions about its conduct. However, my thinking and decision making on my 'somewhere else', India or Pakistan., or Iran or where-ever, is less rational, because I see it as needing protection from exploitation, as being vulnerable, and all its actions, bad or good, as being a result of its exploitation, and therefore somehow beyond mental reprimand. If you ever criticise your 'home country' in front of another person who is, or whose parents were from the Indian subcontinent, they think that you have become too westernised.

There is a certain reluctance to articulate anti-nationalist views in front of 'white Brits'. Because I feel they will misunderstand them, think they are not rational, but based on the fact you will automatically side with the foreigners, because I think that they will always see me as a foreigner. One example was with my first year tutees. I had set an essay title on the impact of colonialism on contemporary patterns of development and we were discussing ideas. The conversation somehow turned to awareness and guilt of present-day Europe for past exploitation, and we compared that to the recent demand by Britain for an apology from Japan for war crimes. The class was in agreement that this was a little ridiculous, except one of the students. He said that he thought that Japan should apologise. The group fell silent for a while and I think expected me to thrash it out with him. Instead, I let it pass. I'm not sure exactly why. Partly because I think that students should be encouraged to hold their own opinions without being gunned down, and partly because I felt that that student had a problem fitting in with the rest of the group and, I didn't want to alienate him any further by arguing against his point. But that wasn't all, it was also because there was an angst on my part. A faint thought had fled through my head: The rest of the group were entitled to criticise Britain: they were truly British. If I did so it only emphasised my 'other' status. It suddenly made me feel vulnerable and wonder about how the students saw me: what did they see when they looked at me: had my world-view been strongly but inadvertently asserted by my choice of discussion and essay topics in the tutorials, had they translated this into an 'ethnicity', did they think that I set the topics I did because of my parents origins, did they see me as being truly British?

Thinking of myself as British is always provisional and problematic: maybe that is why many choose not to. Because I may think of myself as British, but then something or someone comes along to remind you that you are only conditionally, or part-time British, that not everyone sees you as British.

## Summary

There has been, both in the general social science literature and in specific accounts of the identities of British Asians, a great deal of emphasis on boundary maintenance and on the perpetuation of what are presented as conscious, clearly worked out, homogenous and fixed cultural values (Bachu 1993). There exists the idea, for example, both in 'common-sense' discourses and in the work of some academic commentators, of the notion of an embracing Asian 'community' with a commonality other than just having originated from South-Asia. From the outside, this assertion fuels notions of homogeneity linked to fixed notions of ethnicity based on race and facilitates labelling practices (Alexander 1996). Some commentators have taken great pains to describe traditional practices such as dowry systems, arranged marriages, and so on, without an examination of the actual role they play in the everyday lives of young people (Brah 1992, Bachu 1993).

As we have seen, cultural resources that may be seen as South-Asian 'traditions' have been consciously evaluated and appropriated by the young people studied here, as with Shazia's desire for an introduced marriage. In many cases cultural traditions have been re-interpreted and given a new meaning, as in the case of resurgent forms of Islam. The problem is between form and meaning. Shared forms of cultural expression may hide differences in level of meaning. Cultural forms can appear to be the same through history, giving an impression of stability, while carrying new and different meanings. For example the adoption of the bindi by young Europeans certainly does not have the same meaning as it does when worn by a young Hindu girl in Bradford, and even in this context it has different meaning from when worn in rural India.

Furthermore, theorists commenting on the ethnicities of British Asians have often resorted to simplistic notions of culture. There has been a tendency to view young British Asians as 'trapped between two cultures'. What might be considered a more refined version of

this theme of 'confusion' has been expounded by theorists such as Ghuman (1999) and Taylor (1976) and Taylor and Hergarty (1985) (see also Hutnik 1991). Ghuman notes that he found identity among young British Asians to be 'compartmentalised' through the experience of meeting the demands of a number of cultures. In contrast, this study found young people were well aware of notions of cultural confusion, and themselves argued this was not the case. The identifications of young British Asians in this study were not 'compartmentalised'. Rather, they identified with a range of different individuals and groups, depending on the social relations of the space of interaction. As I noted at the beginning of this chapter, psychologists assert that individuals use a 'functional life-script' to help them negotiate social life. As such, the functional life-script of the young people, the different cultural frameworks which they have been exposed to, have given many of them a wealth of resources and experiences to draw on in their identifications. The use of the term 'compartmentalisation of behaviour' to cope with demands (Wade and Souter 1992) suggests such people live by shuttling between two 'identities'. Contrasting with this, what others have argued, and this study found, is that the nature of identification is inherently nomadic and changeable according to the politics of the situation.

In this I agree with those who are doubtful of the notion of cultural confusion or being 'trapped between two cultures' (e.g. Brah and Minhas 1985, Gurnah 1989, Ballard 1994a). Ballard (1994a) asks us to question whether participation in multiple social and cultural arenas necessarily causes psychological confusion. He goes on to argue that exposure to multiple cultural frameworks is much like being multi-lingual, following the rules and codes of one language, and then switching to another, a task that most bi-linguists have no problem with. Even this vision carries some implicit assumptions about the coherency and separateness of cultures. Cultures, as commentators have been arguing, are not bounded, and are not so totally different from each other. British cultures are expanding and changing to incorporate the influences of other groups, as are the particular cultural frameworks of parents and young

people in particular. Furthermore, many young people, not just from minority groups, interact in very different social arenas at different times - at work, at home, with friends, etc. Cultures are made apparent by particular codes that are used to signify the underlying value system. The young people have shown that while identifying with a wide range of social groups, their fundamental value systems do not change in different contexts. Yet they do have the resources to change, or hide or reveal symbols and cultural markers of their values in order to cope with the demands of the cultural spheres in which they interact. At the same time, they are engaged in the creation of new cultures that fit the ways they live and the ways they want to live. Gurnah (1989: 191) writes of second and third generation immigrants as:

... a new generation of keen young, British, working-class, black people, who will make liars out of those who accuse them of being caught *between* two cultures, implying confusion and lack of fulfilment in their lives. What these young people are in fact doing is existentially forging a new culture for their own benefit. [original emphasis]

Bachu (1993:101) too notes that the view of young British Asians as "... cultural entrepreneurs who are actively engaging with their cultural frameworks, whilst continuously transforming them is one that is largely absent from the literature and from common-sense sensibilities". Perhaps the phrase 'cultural entrepreneurs' is a little exaggerated. After all, everyone is active in creating, negotiating, and challenging cultural frameworks. Yet, the literature certainly gives insufficient attention to the way (young) British Asians actively question and challenge the cultural resources that are available to them, as we have seen from this study. Rather, the literature is inclined to portray them as passive consumers of, and performers in, the 'reified' cultures of their parents.

Certainly, in some contexts, as some primordialist exponents of ethnicity describe, these young people created ethnicities that drew on notions of common origins, colour, culture and religion. But, as Ross and DeVos (1995:13) point out, these are often drawn on in a "... *subjective* sense of loyalty based on *imagined* origins and parentage" [emphasis added]. The

evidence from this study suggests that these commonalties were imagined to be important partly because there was substantial demarcation by others using these axes, thereby creating an interest group. With concern for this, Elwert's (1997:253) ideas on ethnicity are illuminating. Here he notes that:

One remarkable feature of we-groups is the process we call *switching*. This means a rapid change from one frame of reference to the other. A class movement may become a nationalist one, a nationalist movement transforms itself into a religious mobilisation, or a religious network redefines itself as a class movement.

He gives the example of groups that switch their frames of reference but where the objective remains the same, such as the socialist group in Sri Lanka, which started out as a class movement but subsequently became nationalist organisation. We can also apply this concept to the ethnicities of young people, where the parameters of reference, or identification, changes with changing circumstances, but the desired objective, that of successful interaction within a social space, remains the same. As such we can see the shifting boundaries of community and the conceptualisation of an inclusive 'asian community' is contextual and the result of a politics of interaction.

As well as drawing on what have been seen as more traditional 'ethnic resources', such as those based on colour, religion and so on, in some contexts the young people in the study were involved in the creation of 'new ethnicities' that drew on a variety of influences. Some of these were drawn from beyond commonly conceived 'ethnic' commonalties of regional origin, religion and so on. But these ethnicities did not have tidy boundaries. One of the main propositions of cultural studies theorists has been that 'new ethnicities' are being created out of a tension between the local and the global (Back 1996, Hall 1991). Relatedly, there has also been a recent emphasis on the importance of scale of spaces (see Strathern, Massey ). Certainly the global nexus is far more readily apparent in our everyday lives than it has been in the past, but to say that there is a tension between the two is to imply that these impulses are



contradictory, and that there is a fundamental structural difference between the two which is not reconcilable. As Benhabib (1992) and others have suggested, the global is in fact made up of the local and vice-versa, where does local end, and where does the global begin?, is the local really local if it has been shaped by outside forces? In fact, telling them apart is difficult, as we have seen from the study, the difference is to do with the complexity and dominance of particular types of social relations within that space. Looking at what might be considered a small scale space, for example the space of the family, the complexity of social relations is created by impulses which are wider in scope than the family home, but with its interaction with other spaces too- which might be far more global in reach, such as with the ethnic community at home, or the inclusion of particular Muslims into the young peoples' conception of an Islamic community.

As such, the young people's constructions of community are negotiable and often include groups outside the British Asian population. Their lifestyles also reflect this change. However, this was loosely regulated by the young British Asian population. As we have seen in the study, acceptability of lifestyle choices amongst young British Asians can depend greatly on how they measure up to the yardstick of 'Asianess'. This yardstick itself has been created out of relationships between young British Asians and other social groups. Moreover, the yardstick is gendered and sexualised. It may include conforming to chosen cultural and other symbolic practices. Barth (1969) has pointed out that very often the 'cultural stuff inside' is what actually defines the boundaries of ethnicity. However, as we have seen with these young British Asians, although aspects of cultural commonality may be a resource used in ethnic identifications, culture is not coterminous with ethnicity. By prioritising groups as 'ethnic', in the sense that they share a common cultural framework, we risk equating 'colour' with 'culture' and glossing over other identifications and other ways in which the young British Asians define themselves.

## **Chapter six.**

### **Creating Ethnicities: Conceptual inadequacies**

#### **Overview**

In previous chapters I have presented and analysed interactions of young people within different social spaces, with the dual objectives of presenting a range of different identities subsumed under the umbrella categorisation 'British Asian', and understanding the ways ethnic identities are created through social interaction. I have tried to describe, through examples and commentary, cultural forms that may lend themselves to the mobilisation and perception of common ethnic resources, thereby creating different groups of exclusion and inclusion. As I suggested in the final section of Chapter five, constitutive of this process of the construction of ethnic commonalities has been populist discourses, in particular the way in which nationalisms operate in excluding certain groups from national belongings, encouraging perception as a distinct 'ethnic' group. In this chapter I briefly suggest the ways in which constructions of 'British-ness' contribute to the politics of belonging. I argue that the concepts of integration/exclusion, in the way they have been applied to ethnic minorities in political and academic discourse, are often ethnocentric. In the political arena they are based on an 'assimilationist' notion of incompatible cultures (Stolcke 1995). These notions, I suggest, are informed by and informing of a basic misconception of culture and ethnicity (D'hondt et al 1995).

In the first part of this chapter, I return to the term 'integration'. I focus on how the terms integration and exclusion are used by state policy and how this use relates to British nationalism. I will argue that significant in the politics of belonging is the way in which 'British-ness' is constructed. I argue following the work of others, that British nationalism excludes minority groups through the understanding of 'other' cultures as 'incompatible', and

because it is based on a reified notion of an essential 'English ethnicity'. In the second section, I look at the way some concepts and terminology in academia result in a 'naturalisation' of ethnicity and culture. Mason (1995) argues that naturalised conceptualisation of ethnicity and culture in academia can lend themselves to the kind of misuse made by policy makers and misappropriation in common-sense discourses. In the final section, I refer back to the findings of this study to suggest ways in which ethnicity could be reconceptualised to avoid a reification of ethnicity, culture and difference.

## **Integration and Exclusion: Policy Talks**

Exclusion/integration are problematic terms, though Geddes and Favell (1999) suggest that they have been used quite readily by policy makers and at times quite unreflectively by academics. The term 'socially excluded' in the UK has today been applied to those who were yesterday referred to, amongst other terms, as 'the underclass', with similar descriptions and explanations of their position within society (Samers 1998). Indeed, within academia, the term exclusion has been used in a variety of different contexts, but seems to have overtaken terms such as 'deprivation', 'marginalisation', 'poverty', 'spatial segregation', and so on (Samers 1998).

In 'The problematic nature of exclusion', Sibley (1998:116) suggests that the main ways in which exclusion have been conceived and analysed have been one-dimensional. He notes that "Exclusion has been mainly conceived of in terms of how the economic system leaves some people on the margins, those who are weakly connected to the economy". Economic marginalisation, Sibley argues, is only one way of examining exclusion. There exist other processes of exclusion, the origins of which lie beyond the labour market. Sibley uses the term 'exclusion' as a marker of social cleavage, noting that an important form of exclusion is that of civil exclusion; from civil rights, voting, benefits, political representation, and so on. In this study, I have suggested there is a form of social exclusion where alternative lifestyles or ways

of being are excluded, misrepresented, ridiculed, or seen as unfitting with the ideas of British nation-building. This type of social exclusion is at work when claims are made that particular ethnic minority groups need to be 'integrated' into British society. From this perspective, analyses of exclusion and integration need to go beyond the realm of citizenship and political participation, into that of the politics of everyday life.

As noted in the opening chapter, integration and its antonym 'exclusion', are processes that involve more than one party; the party integrating and the party that is being integrated. When viewed like this, these terms necessarily involve multiparty action. However, as Geddes and Favell (1999) point out, there has been a reluctance on the part of policy makers to engage with issues of social exclusion and ethnic groups as a process involving reciprocal relationships. Rather the focus has been on the abstract ways of being of the 'excluded' group. Thus, in an analysis of 'New Labour' political rhetoric, Fairclough (2000) notes that exclusion is used as a noun, suggesting a way of 'being', rather than a negotiated process of 'becoming'. Gardner and Shukkur (1994:164) link this point to academic research when they note that: "While it has long been recognised that migration is a process, the ways in which migrants and their offspring adapt and readapt and continually re-interpret their values and lifestyles in their new settings have been little studied". Since migration is a process, it must necessarily involve an analysis of the *relationship* between the immigrants and others within British society, it must look at the process of inclusion. 'Inclusion' after migration is not something that can be understood by focusing solely on cultural traditions and lifestyle choices amongst immigrants. The politics of belonging within the nation, and within other spheres of social relations, need to be understood. It was from this angle that this study sought to examine the exclusion of British Asians, grounding the analysis in everyday interaction.

Since the arrival of large numbers of immigrants to Britain, it has been evident that they were seen as a 'problem' by wider British society and by the government itself (Saggar 1999,

see also Schierup 1997 for a European perspective). Even today, issues concerning immigrants are still referred to as the 'immigrant problem' (Schierup 1997). Political rhetoric, throughout the post-war period, has suggested that integration is a one-way process. The message sent out is that ethnic minority groups belong to a culture that is "...alien to, and unassimilable with the British way of life" (Alexander 1996:3). Not surprisingly, given this orientation, the idea that ethnic communities need to assimilate into British ways of being is clearly evident in post-war policy. Thus, in the early 1970s the UK government ran a course of 'socialisation programmes', which included not only language training, but also childcare and health care, as if immigrants had no knowledge of adequate child or health care, or their own methods were unsatisfactory (Parmar 1982). Chambers (1993) notes of the 1980s, Thatcherite policy saw the 'inclusion' of immigrant populations into Britain as a need for them to talk, dress, eat and act as native-born Britons. Assimilation, or the eradication or dilution of immigrant cultures, was the aim of this type of policy, both creating and feeding off notions of the ghettoisation of ethnic groups in society, or the imminent death of a truly British identity (see Esman 1994). Key politicians and community leaders have followed this line of thought, reifying difference and demanding that ethnic groups assimilate into wider British culture.

For Jenkins (1999) there is a type of racism inherent in the way ethnicity is popularly and politically seen. As Wallman (1986) points out, in Britain the term ethnicity is used not only to designate those of different colour, but to suggest they have chosen to pledge allegiance to their country of origin. Implicit in this view is the notion that those given an ethnic status are responsible for non-inclusion in the imaginings of the nation; if only they would change and assimilate, then they would be integrated into the nation. Ray Honeyford (1988) is just one example of this type of thinking. Honeyford proposed that since immigrants are here out of choice, it is their responsibility to 'adapt' to their new circumstances. He points out that the Home Affairs Committee on Racial Disadvantage (1981) noted that 'Migration does not just

mean a change of residence. It means a change of habits, outlook and values' (quoted in Honeyford 1988:48).

Even quite recently, Young (1990a, 1999) notes that policy has placed blame and onus for action on the excluded group. As such the emphasis has been on integration as 'assimilation'. Adoption policy advocates, for example, assert that children of ethnic minorities should be placed with parents of the same race, to encourage a 'positive ethnic identity' (Phoenix and Owen 1996). This conflation of race with culture and ethnicity is also inherent in wider social policy. Official terminology, for example that found in the UK Census, naturalises ethnicity and difference by asking respondents to indicate ethnicity by ticking boxes of territorial origins, while there is only one box for a 'white' ethnicity (see Bulmer 1996, Banton 1997). The underlying foundation of this terminology is a belief in ethnicities based on colour and territory; that is, if you are 'brown', then you will naturally have a different ethnic identity to 'white' people (D'hondt et al 1995). Ethnicity is thus popularly conceived as something that 'other' people have, as a property of non-whites (Baumann 1999). The very term 'ethnic minority', which is used to categorise and describe certain groups with origins outside the UK, emphasises ethnicity as physical difference and observable cultural difference (Smith and Blanc 1995, Mason 1995).

Others have suggested a potentially dangerous proposition implicit in the use of the term ethnic minority when applied only to non-whites. For example, Mason (1995:16) asserts that usage of the term 'ethnic minority' gives rise to opportunities for policy makers, amongst others, to "... deny the real basis of much social deprivation and exclusion, skin colour, and to focus instead upon 'ethnic' difference". He goes on to suggest that: "It is not a large step from here to define difference itself as the problem and to blame those who are 'different' for all or some of their problems". Alund (1997:101) similarly warns of "...this culturalization of social disparity", which in turning cultures into natural phenomena, has the potential to create a 'new

racism'; one that re-stresses the need for ethnic minority groups to assimilate with 'British' culture and values. Measurements of 'integration' illustrate the explicitly assimilationist nature of the use of the term. As recently as 1997, for example, Leveau published research on the integration of minority ethnic groups using 'integration values', which, for example, included having a sexual relationship with a member from outside an ethnic community. In this we see that 'integration' has replaced the vocabulary rather than the concepts behind 'assimilation'. It has not removed, and will not remove but perpetuate, the hostility, discrimination and domination with which alternative ways of being are often met.

The underlying assumptions of the integrationalist approach are in themselves flawed, as they are based on a particular type of nationalism. Firstly, there is the explicit assumption that there is a cultural distance between ethnic minorities and British culture, and that the assimilation of an ethnic minority is necessary due to cultural incompatibility (Balibar 1991). It also suggests that there is a homogenous, unchanging, British culture, into which ethnic minorities must integrate (see Bonnett 1996, Anthias 1998). This type of cultural prejudice is a thinly veiled racism which has a particularly strong exclusionary effect on the groups targeted. Commentators have long been arguing that the nation is constructed around the idea of a common 'ethnic' heritage, or that of a super ethnos. British nationalism in particular is constructed around a common heritage, to which imperialism and its legitimator, the idea of superior and inferior races, is central. However, as Gilroy (1987:40) points out, other factors have sustained and complicated racism: "Today's British racism, anchored in national decline rather than imperial expansion overseas, does not necessarily proceed through readily apparent notions of superiority and inferiority". Instead, it is hidden in notions of homogenous ethno-national identities and the cultural incompatibility of immigrants. These are articulated through 'integration' policies and the exclusion of groups from the imaginings of national belonging (see Martinello 1995).

Gilroy (1987) and Cohen (1988) both suggest that racism is an inherent part of British nationalism and white British ethnicities (also see Balibar and Wallerstein 1991). British nationalism irons away certain differences and includes them into the imaginings of the nation, while others are exaggerated with the result of exclusion. The subjects of exaggeration and exclusion are more often than not those whose skin colour stands out. This may then be extrapolated into a cultural-territorial difference, as Norman Tebbitt's Cricket test does, to single out who is included, or who may think of themselves as included, and who is not. The way in which the British nation is constructed makes it difficult for immigrant groups to think of themselves as British, or as English. As Miles (1982) asserts, the very way the boundaries of 'Britishness' and 'Englishness' are conceived, leads to some groups being more acceptable than others to join this collectivity. He suggests, for example, that 'Englishness' and 'Britishness' are seen as the same, whereas 'Britishness' and, for example, 'Scottishness' are not, thus firmly locating 'Englishness' at the centre of a British identity. 'English' itself has very specific membership rules, and unlike 'Britishness', is not open to negotiation by outside groups. These outside groups may be included, but will have relative positions of 'Britishness' (also see Crowley 1999, Donald 1993). As such, 'British' is not recognised as being a political category, but a way of life (Rex 1998). We have seen this to be the case with the participants of the study, none of whom chose to call themselves 'English', but would refer to themselves as 'British' in some contexts. Shelley and Winck (1995) also stress the way in which lifestyles and personalities are thought about in ethno-national terms. They offer examples of the popular use of phrases like 'typically English' to describe particular social phenomena that do not include those pertaining to ethnic minorities. Others note the problematic way in which particular symbols convey national 'typicality', as in something or someone that is 'typically British' (Cubitt 1998). British national consciousness, it is suggested, like some other nationalisms, has a 'craving for nostalgia' (Shelley and Wincks 1995:253, see also Alund 1997). This invokes looking back to an era "... before the rot and national decline had set in, when Britain was still 'Great' " (Chambers 1993:145). This has serious implications for those who are not included



within this national consciousness, and as Chambers (1993) suggests, the excluded are not just ethnic minority groups. Chambers (1993:146) notes that British nationalism is "... symbolically elaborated around consecrated relics, traditions, and shrines- Westminster, the monarchy, Oxbridge, the royal navy, the public school system, the syllabus of English. It is as though, through an undisturbed continuity, the very spirit of 'history' has laid its blessing on the nation". As such, notions of 'Britishness' are built on a cultural conservatism that privileges elite groups, and their lifestyles and personal experiences. As Cohen (1996:281) notes, nationalism draws a corollary between nation and individual: "From the top downwards, the individual is represented as the nation writ small; from the bottom up, the nation is the individual writ large". This homology is particularly excluding in that it distinguishes *individuals* whose personal experiences do not fit into that of the nation's character. As well as the inclusion of particular personal experiences and personalities, there has also been the strong presence of particular histories in the imaginings of the British nation. As Cubbitt (1998:5) notes, there is a "... blurring of distinctions, not just between the nation as an abstraction and the life experiences of its members, but also between the nation's present and its past".

The construction of British nationhood, then, gives provisional access to national belonging, and suggests the incompatibility of other cultures with a truly 'British way of life'. This exclusion can serve to reinforce a 'them and us attitude' in all parties, reifying differences predicated on ethnic origins and excluding British-Asians from the imagined nation. As we have seen, at times many of the young people in this study had problems with identifying themselves as 'British' because of the way they felt they did not, or did not want to, fit in with the idea of 'British-ness'. Both mine and Divia's examples demonstrate clearly that the inclusion of particular histories as central to the imaginings of the nation have left us feeling as if we are 'not really' British.

However, the national imagined community is not fixed and can change to include groups that were previously excluded, as well as excluding those who were previously included (see Bhabha 1990a). So of crucial importance to the way those from minority ethnic groups are seen, and the way in which they see themselves, is the way the state views them. This is reflected both in public policy and in public opinion. But, we may ask, can government policy alone provide for and change the way we see 'excluded' minority groups and the ways we may conceptualise ethnicity, minority groups and their relationships with other groups in British society (Werbner 1997, also Solomos 1995)? It is not just 'common-sense ideas' about immigrants, cultures and ethnicity that have reified difference. Baunmann (1999) is amongst those who suggest that academia has not managed to convince itself of the situated nature of identities, as some researchers have continued to essentialise and naturalise these categories.

### **Ethnicity and culture in academia**

The present ways ethnicity is understood in academic accounts of young identities and in popular discourses have contributed to exclusionary practices. As Geddes and Favell (1999) suggest, much of the recent research on immigrants and their children has looked at the integration of these groups into majority society. This approach of documenting the cultural forms present within the immigrant populations, they contend, has had the effect of backing social and immigration policy by suggesting there is a one-way process for immigrants to assimilate with their host society. For Geddes and Favell, even commentaries on racism in the host society towards immigrants and their children, or on their lifestyles and culture in general, reinforce the essentialised 'ethnic categories' that sustain discrimination. Anthias and Yuval-Davis (1992:112), for example, have suggested that, unlike racist discourses and racial categorisation, ethnic labelling does not subordinate the groups categorised, but is merely the "positing of an immutable communal difference". They argue that racism is dependent on notions of *biological origin*, and only marginally focuses on cultural and ethnic differences.

This viewpoint seems naïve, since 'ethnicity' as it is popularly conceptualised, has merely replaced 'race', or is conflated with culture, which are structured in a 'civilised/ modern' or 'primitive/tradition hierarchy (Pieterse 1994, Duncan 1993). Furthermore, differences are rarely seen merely as 'not the same', but usually have a value judgement accorded to them (Mackey 1992, referred to in Cornwall and Lindisfarne 1995). As Wicker (1997b:143) points out, conceptualising groups as 'different', " ...depend[s] on labelling, stigmatising, marginalising, and segregating a discernible 'other'". Thus different is never 'just different'. It is imbued with relations and hierarchies of power.

The other problem with the ways in which 'ethnicity' and 'culture' have been conceptualised by some commentators is that too often they are conceived of as static entities. This lends itself to further misconceptions, for example to those of nation–culture contiguities, whereby cultures are seen in terms of nation-state boundaries, as "... homogenous, coherent, territorial suprasubjective entities.." (Wicker 1997a:12). This type of conceptualisation has the potential to support the type of racially inspired nationalist rhetoric which creates inclusionary/exclusionary practices. Despite assertions to the contrary, the idea of cultural-spatial contiguity appears still to be pervasive throughout the social sciences. The use of hyphenated identities such as Chinese-American, British-Asian, and so on, is a practice common in cultural studies, which implies two distinct cultural presences, based on territorial difference. Even the second or third generation children of immigrants are still referred to with hyphens, as if they are subscribing members to a 'culture' in their parents' original 'territory'. Amit-Talai and Knowles (1996a) note that the very categories we are supposed to have left behind, categories such as 'Asian', 'Black', 'Chinese' and so on, still appear in our work, creating a 'wheel-spinning effect' (see also MacKenzie and Crowcroft 1996, 1994 who suggest describing rather than categorising groups in medical research). Calgar (1997) also points to examples of 'cultural holism' in the academic literature, as seen in references to Turkey and 'Turkish' culture, or studies of Britain and 'British' culture. In this genre, immigrant studies

regularly and unproblematically refer back to cultural practices in countries (and times) immigrants have left. For Baumann (1999:145) research topics such as "... 'The Turks in Berlin', 'Berbers in Paris', or 'The Sikhs in New York' ... [focus] on a national, ethnic, or religious minority as if anyone could know in advance how this minority is bounded and which processes proceed inside and which outside that assumed community". It is an accusation of which the title of this study is also at fault.

Even liberal, postmodern musings, especially those on notions of cultural hybridity, have fallen into the theoretical pit of essentialism and stasis. As Amit-Talai and Knowles (1996) make clear, although for three decades now, some researchers have been producing work that stresses the situational nature of both culture and identities, there is still a wide range of literature which continues to essentialise identity: "... in spite of the allusions to borderzones and fluidity - as little more than a bricolage of some very superficial categories of race, ethnicity, gender and class" (Amit-Talai 1996:109). Theorists of hybridity, the supposed antidote to essentialist thinking, all too often conceive of cultures as fixed entities. The basic proposition, that a new, mixed, 'syncretic' culture is born from two or more different ones, implies boundedness and stasis of the two 'original' cultures. The 'original' cultures are not granted with the same hybridised qualities which the third is. Yet we know that the central feature of every culture is precisely that it is created by, changes and adapts to, prevailing historic and socio-economic conditions. This recent tendency to celebrate hybridity and syncretism as true forms of resistancial identity has fitted cosily with postmodern ideas of 'bricolage' and 'fragmentation' (Coombes 1994). Other identities and cultural practices that do not exhibit explicit interculturalisation have consequently been labelled as 'traditional', creating a new hierarchy of practices. As Lavie and Swedenburg (1996) argue, the exoticised 'other' has merely been replaced with the newly exotic 'hybrid'. The hybridisation that has been identified by modern cultural critics is certainly not a phenomenon new to the postmodern condition (e.g. see Pieterse 's (1994) account of the influences that have contributed to modern European

cultures). As Judith Butler points out, hybridization is not only a contemporary phenomenon, but "... a long history of confrontations between unequal cultures and forces, in which the stronger culture [or stronger power] struggles to control, remake or eliminate the subordinate partner (in Lavie and Swedenburg 1996:9). All cultures are hybrids. They appropriate and change according to prevailing circumstances. Hybridity is a fundamental characteristic of the creativity of cultures. In this context it seems somewhat absurd to believe that hybridisation is a recent phenomenon. Is it really conceivable to imagine that cultures in the past did not change as socio-political circumstances altered in different regions, as modes and products of agriculture changed, as people evolved physiologically, as the importance and availability of resources changed, as family and kinship systems changed, as climate change occurred, as generations grew, and as invasions and new settlement took place? To assert that this is conceivable seems to be little more than a politically motivated claim. Caglar (1997) has suggested that it is an example of the west re-colonising the 'other' by trying to lay a unique claim, both in terms of definition and direction, to a time-less processes of cultural change. Others have noted that much of this theorisation of hybridity has not been the product of empirical social research (Back 1996, Lavie and Swedenburg 1996, Taylor 1998). Others are equally sceptical of the shift in cultural studies and other disciplines away from the study of social action to the study of texts (e.g. Sparkes 1996). Thus Cambridge (1996) notes that fashionable invocations of 'hybridity', 'ambivalence' and 'resistance' tend to be uncritical, and may just be being used to reinforce black cultural critics' own political manifestos. Hoggart (1995) and Wicker (1997a:7) similarly suggest that this type of cultural critique is "... less about seeking truth than about developing and practising the postmodern meta-language", or confirming ones position within the discipline through the use of a particular type of language.

Whatever the motivation behind such cultural critique, as suggested in the opening chapters, there is a need to link theory with social realities. In this context Amit-Talai and

Knowles (1996:11) argue for a greater linking to social realities in order to move beyond 'lazy radicalism' and political hyperbole:

How comforting it is to feel that resistance can still be achieved through a hermeneutics that rarely requires straying from the university library or the television set or that the production of texts can stand in for effective political changes.

As Pollert (1996) notes of feminist discourse, use of terms such as 'patriarchy' and 'masculinism' become reductionist and create their own grand narratives when de-linked from the theory that created them. We should be careful in our invocations of 'hybridity' and related concepts, for if unlinked to social realities, they will become hollow, political mantra.

Other liberal schools of thought that had the potential to contribute to the conceptualisation of ethnicities have also been exposed as compounding the conceptual problem. Multiculturalism, once hailed as the solution to 'problems' of diversity within the nation-state, has now been recognised as lacking conceptual and political rigour (Schierup 1997). It is suggested that multiculturalism only recognises superficial, cultural differences (Donald and Rattansi 1992), and thus

... it only really supports the expression and celebration of private forms of difference: in family, food, religious conventions, and so on. It is an expression of 'nation as a unity of human difference' which lacks a real conception of how tensions arising from those differences can be managed. (Amit-Talai and Knowles 1996:49)

Through this lack of political strategy and focus on bounding and sustaining ethnic communities, it has been suggested that an impression has been created that 'ethnic minorities' are merely the targets of social policy rather than social actors (Ali 1992). Others note the problematic nature of the way 'difference' is constructed in multicultural discourses. Wicker (1997a:34) is amongst those, in noting that multiculturalism, although based on the notion of 'the right to be different', often reduces the cultures and groups it describes as simply inherently 'different'. In this manner, much thought in ethnic relations and notions of multiculturalism

reduces culture to 'ethnic origins' (Caglar 1997). The belief is that a nation or place may be 'multi-cultural', in that it contains many different cultures, with cultures unchanging (or very slowly adjusting), as well as being complete and distinct from each other (Alund 1997, Anthias 1998, Baumann 1999). This mode of thinking unwittingly carries the implicit assumption that cultures are distinct from each other, that a territory has a particular culture; and that one nation equals one culture, by the very concept of different cultures inhabiting a new space that was not their space of creation. Caglar (1997) asks, how can cultures that live side by side, that jostle with each other in the street and in the public consciousness, be thought of as separate from each other? How can the cultural spaces young British Asians occupy be different and distinct from those other Britons inhabit? Multiculturalism, as well as seeing cultures as distinct from each other, grants them equal status while refusing to acknowledge the privileged position of the 'host' culture. Thus it lacks a political agenda for addressing issues of inequality (Castles 1993), while sustaining finite notions of cultural difference.

Despite the conceptual advances that have been made in viewing ethnicity, identity and culture, there needs to be more linkage to social realities (Baumann 1999). Furthermore, there is a frequent slippage by commentators into essentialist thinking, as suggested in terms like 'producing identities' (Bachu 1996). As Amit-Talai (1996:110) laments:

In spite of our awareness that terms such as community, society or nation, overestimate the boundedness, and underestimate the complexity of social and cultural experience, our efforts at moving beyond this popular terminology have been underwhelming. At best we have succeeded in qualifying these terms by alluding to an in-between alternative of borderzones between communities, hybrids of cultures and transnationalism. For twenty-five years we have acknowledged that ethnicity is a 'matter of degree' associated with a wide variety of situations and expressions. Yet our most ubiquitous representation still involves discrete ethnic communities with leaders, associations and identifiable members.

In formulating a de-essentialised ethnicity, there is a need to rid theory and commentary of metaphors that fix identities in space-time. I have already suggested that concept of 'multiple' or 'fragmented' identities goes only part of the way in de-essentialising culture, identity and ethnicity. We need to be more rigorous in our thought and language, as we can see that even well thought-out commentary can slip into the language of an essentialised ethnicity. To illustrate this point again, I will use the example of Baumann (1999:64), whose informed and ideas and brilliant prose I have referenced all the way through this study. In an uncharacteristic slippage of thought he notes that: "Ethnic identities can be stressed or unstressed, enjoyed or resented, imposed or even denied, all depending on situation and context". As I suggested in Chapter four and Chapter five, stressing or exaggerating and 'fitting in' or de-emphasising potential 'ethnic' attributes, is exactly what identity or identification constitutes, as one has to identify in relation to what the other is or is not, not what can be done with an identity as Baumann's prose implies. Stressing or unstressing, or understanding what one wants from a relationship *is* a form of ethnic identification, informed by real/imaginary/created samenesses and differences. Furthermore, how may identities be 'adjusted' if there are no pre-formulated identities? The process by which ethnicity is created and recreated should be seen as *identification* through a dialogical process. Identification may result in a positioning, but we should acknowledge the difficulties and dangers of defining a position which is by nature temporary and fleeting and dependent on the temporary, fleeting positioning of others in that relationship.

## **Towards a concept of ethnicity**

As has been proposed by numerous commentators, ethnicity should be seen as a contextual identification with a collectivity. By way of adding qualitative information collected using ethnographic methods, this study has aimed to contribute empirically to the idea of ethnicity as situated and constantly negotiated. Through the use of an approach that analyses everyday



experience and identifications, I have suggested that social exclusion should be conceptualised not as a finite state, but as a 'politics of belonging' enacted in social relations, and manifesting itself in ethnicities.

Contributing to the types and places of everyday interaction in the lives of young people were the influences of other cultures and values in their spaces of interaction, as well as various discourses regarding race, colour, South-Asians, religion, nationhood, and so on. 'New' ethnicities (as in 'new to our conception of British Asian ethnicities') were being created by young people. These drew on resources and linkages with other social groups and lifestyles that went well beyond the British Asian population. Yet ethnicity constructions that drew on commonalities of religion, race and regional origin were also common in the identifications of this study's participants. As commentators have noted, the creation of ethnic groupings is often the result of unequal relationships present in a society (Devalle 1992). As such:

Similar experiences related to oppression, discrimination and racism can, independently of conspicuous cultural differences, form the basis for solidarity and a broad social mobilisation and construction of collective identity. (Alund 1997:100)

The emphasis in this concept of ethnicity is on the frameworks within which groups are attributed with a particular ethnicity. The sense of 'people-hood' created through common experiences may be further facilitated if the group has observable physical traits such as skin pigmentation, which can help to mark a group boundary. The dominant group, however, has the power to define other ethnic groups using the parameters they feel, real or imagined, are particularly salient. The result is that populations are identified by the dominant group using selected physical traits. Ethnic groups are demarcated using these physical traits and perceived as having selected cultural traits, as seen in the way a homogenous British Asian entity has been labelled (Wilson 1973, Alt 1998). Following this, it is easy for the collectivity that has been ascribed an ethnicity, to reify this 'ethnicity' through collective grouping using the very

same ascription, such as the perception and articulation of an 'Asian community' by British Asians. As Comaroff and Comaroff (1992: 62-63) note: "... the very fact that such action is conducted by and for groups marked by their cultural identities confirms the perception that these identities do provide the only available basis of collective ... action". Similarly, Baumann (1999) suggests that by working with categories that have been constructed from the outside, academics cannot fight misrepresentation or discrimination, as we are merely supporting and sustaining the categories that have been created by it.

This complex inter-related construction of ethnicity as relational and self-ascribed, as well as ascribed from outside, is particularly evident in the findings of this study. The British Asian participants in the study were from a diverse range of cultural, linguistic, religious and regional groups. Although remnants of differences based on South-Asian region, language, and so on, were often exhibited by the parents, such differences were not strongly articulated by the young people. Undoubtedly, this has been partly due to removal from the socio-historic conditions that created them in the first place. Consequently, as we have seen with some younger British Asians, erosion of the knowledge and importance of South-Asian regional origins has encouraged them, within particular contexts, to see them selves as a united 'community'. In addition to this erosion of regional and cultural differences, a strong influence on the creation of a common identity within the British Asian population has been their difference vis-à-vis the wider British population. This form of ethnic construction has parallels with some immigrant groups in the USA. Italian Americans, for example, although of diverse regional backgrounds, were encouraged through similar economic, political and social circumstances too see themselves as a common group (Taylor 1998). In similar vein, a single British Asian political 'ethnicity' has been created through the fact that, even those whose cultural frameworks may be different, and whose South-Asian origins may have been from a range of different social groups, share similar experiences in the UK. Of equal importance is that British Asians are seen from the outside as being of the same 'ethnic' group (Mason 1995).

This conception of 'sameness in difference' is evident not only in much academic literature, but also in popular discourses that are unable to distinguish between, at the very least, quite different socio-linguistic groups. As suggested in Chapter four, colour has a large part to play in this construction. Ethnicity is negotiated through constructions of difference, of which colour is a strong example. Here in Britain, the defining characteristic of the heterogeneous group 'British Asian' is that everyone is brown rather than 'white', although perhaps some are a bit browner than others. Within certain contexts this construction of Asianness has been adopted by British Asians themselves, even though on the Indian subcontinent, subtle colour differences and facial features are easily recognisable and used to mark out different social groups. Reflecting on this process, McAll (1990:57) notes that:

... belief [of some kind of cultural commonality] can be constructed around whatever conspicuous differences the believers choose that can be used to distinguish them from those outside the association. Such differences, if they had not happened to be picked up to symbolise shared ethnicity, might be of little importance.[.] Equally, they might relate to major differences of language, religion, or custom, but that does not mean that where such differences exist there are necessarily distinct ethnic groups whose boundaries coincide with ethnic boundaries.

As such, colour difference has been crucial in the definition and creation of a British Asian ethnicity. As Wallman (1986) and Baumann (1999) have pointed out, ascribed ethnicity can be very powerful, and often we do not have much choice in the ethnic identifications we make.

However, even with 'colour' as an important ethnic resource, the findings of this study demonstrate that talk of an 'Asian community' may be considered purely relational and thus political, as a result of labelling practices. If we talk of an 'Asian community', we must specify that it has meaning only as a very loose political grouping, applicable only in particular contexts. Even then, there are those who do not see themselves as part of this 'political' community. They would not be seen by others as a part of this 'community' other than by virtue of their skin colour. Further, I am not sure if we can, with any real depth, speak of the young

British Asian participants in this study, other than some of the Bangali Sylheti's, in terms of regional collectivities, such as 'Gujerati's' or 'Punjabis', or refer to them as such. Not only do these classifications not refer to distinct cultural frameworks, but reciprocal linkages and identifications by young people have moved away in many cases from regional solidarity. South-Asian regional distinctions have given way to much broader identifications, some based on UK region, religious commitment, social class, and general lifestyle choice. New particularities and lifestyles are being created from the present socio-historical contexts in which the lives of the young people unfold.

Inclusionary and exclusionary practices of defining and bounding are the basis of any ethnic group. In the case of British Asians, exclusion is taking place by the construction, both from inside the British Asian population and outside, of a diverse group as belonging to a single, inclusive ethnicity. An example, as already noted, is the linking of ethnicity to colour or territorial origins. This is evident in the way questions of ethnicity, that are based on regional origins and colour, are asked in the census or in 'equal opportunity' sections in official documents. Through these types of practices which construct a single British Asian ethnicity, young British Asians are encouraged to see themselves as belonging to an ethnic group that is based on South-Asian origins, while barring them from inclusion in many other social groups. Their subjective ethnicity self-ascription is affected by this kind of ethnicity ascription imposed by dominant groups. Thus the problem of social exclusion of British Asians is not only grounded in material disadvantage or material difference, but also in constructed differences based on the complex interaction of ethnic and cultural labelling practices and attempts at maintaining cultural 'purity'. A strong contribution to this is the way British Asians are 'ascribed' a common ethnicity, and the way this essentialisation has initiated and maintained processes of inclusion and exclusion. Compounding this problem has been a general lack of knowledge about cultural practices of the British Asian population, and the misinformation and continued focus on historical cultural practices of South Asia. Partly this is because of the way

the Asian 'other' has been represented in colonial and popular discourse. Less obviously, it is because of myopia to the wide range of constantly, but slowly, evolving cultural practices.

This study has tried to highlight the very diverse range of lifestyles and identifications that exist under the umbrella categorisation 'British Asian'. It has sought to examine commonalities that young 'British Asians' may share, especially in the nature of the identifications they make and the tactical strategies they use for adaptation and interaction in different social spaces (Ballard 1994). The study has aimed to contribute to understanding concepts of ethnicity by breaking down ways in which ethnic resources are constructed and utilised in social interaction. In analysing social exclusion through the identifications made by young people, I have tried to write against accounts that focus on the insularity and distinctiveness of British Asian cultures, instead examining inclusion/exclusion as a negotiated process of the politics of belonging. As such, I have put forward that British Asian ethnicities can be seen as political, with unstable meaning, changing as a result of identification processes (MacCarthy 1998). The position occupied by young British Asians in the nation's imagination is precarious and often used politically at times of stress. Thus their perception of their place within the nation is constantly negotiated. As Alexander (1996:49) points out in her study of young black male identities: "... nationhood became thus very much a matter of perception, both of self and of others". Ethnicity, then, should be understood as a process of identification, rather than a fixed subject position, constituted through a politics of difference (MacCarthy 1998).

The implications of conceptualising ethnicity and identity as unfixed and relational have been disconcerting for some. It has even been suggested that the lack of fixity is detrimental for the conceptualisation of a politics of difference. The uncritical 'celebration of difference', some have argued, has not opened up new modes of political engagement with issues of inequality (e.g. see Smith 2000, Amit-Talai and Knowles 1996, Harvey 1996, Haraway 1991). Perhaps

this is what Badcock (1996) is referring to in his antipathy to the rise of identity issues. Jameson (1991) is amongst those who asks how we may figure a politics of difference from which to tackle issues of inequality when people are seen as representing a multiplicity of groups at once. This is a portentous question, but it is one that is beyond the scope of this study. But a possible route to answering this question sprung to mind when reading the work of Chantal Mouffe. She reminds us that inequalities are created and sustained through the way in which we assign difference. For her, the answer to the question is clear and self-evident (1994:111):

By accepting that only hybridity creates us as separate entities, it affirms and upholds the nomadic character of every identity... If only people's allegiances are multiplied and their loyalties pluralised will it be possible to create a truly 'agonistic' pluralism. Because where identities are multiplied, passions are divided.

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